

Language of Men

A. L. MORTON

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*"... Our English, the language of men ever famous
and foremost in the achievements of liberty."*

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TO

T. A. JACKSON

A TOKEN PAYMENT ON ACCOUNT
OF A TRULY ASTRONOMICAL DEBT

FOREWORD

THESE essays, in many cases the bye-products of all kinds of other activities, were written over a number of years. For this reason I would draw the attention of the reader to the date at the end of each : in the case especially of some of the earlier ones they might have been written somewhat differently in other circumstances and at other times.

Nevertheless, upon reading them over there seems to be a common thread : all are concerned with books and writers in their relation to living, they are foot notes upon our struggle through the centuries for greater happiness and a more perfect understanding of the world in which we live. They attempt to stress what has been common to ordinary people at all times as voiced by the not quite ordinary people we call poets.

Some of these essays have appeared, not always quite in their present forms, in *The Daily Worker*, *Our Time*, *The Twentieth Century*, *The New English Weekly* and *University Forward*, to the editors of which I am happy to make the customary acknowledgments.

A. L. M.

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On the Nature of the Ballad

WHEN Bishop Percy published his *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* in 1765 he rendered a great service both to his own generation and to posterity, but he did it in a way that very largely obscured the precise nature of that service and the true character of our ballad poetry. The good Bishop was a genuine lover of the ballad but nevertheless presented his offering to the polite world a little apologetically. He found the ballad unpolished, naive, barbarous. It led him into a land of mystery, of changing shapes and uncouth desires, of violence and enchantment. In a word, the ballad was *Romantic*, a voice from the childish past which a mature man of the Eighteenth Century enlightenment could find charming but could not but feel slightly ridiculous.

It was natural therefore, that admiration for the ballad and a cult of the Middle Ages should become one of the hallmarks of the Romantic Revival. They were certainly the opposite of everything which the Eighteenth Century regarded as classical. There was nothing here of the trim form, the precisely ordered expression of the emotions, the exact measure and the contented rationalism of that age. Yet it could hardly be expected that the age should stop to consider whether it might not be the quality of its own classicism which was at fault. It was a true classicism, I think, but a partial and restricted one. It brought order into its picture of the universe by leaving out of account those things which were most calculated to disturb it: its classicism was a sophisticated classicism, but there is also an heroic classicism, and it is to this order that the finest ballads,

like Homer and like the Sagas, seem to belong. It would not be far wrong, I believe, to reverse the old and still prevalent conception and to say that the ballad is the supreme type of English classical poetry and the Middle Ages the true period of English classicism.

So far we have been using words without defining them : what then is the meaning of these two much abused words, *classical* and *romantic*? I think they must be understood as implying opposed conceptions of the nature of man and of his relation to his universe. The classical view tends to accept a rigorously realistic limitation of man's powers. It sees him as placed in a harsh, difficult, cramping environment and as moulded by that environment. Man is thus and thus, it says, born to sin and suffering, driven to extremes of cruelty, passion and folly but capable also of extremes of heroism, nobility and generosity. He is a multi-coloured creature, shot through with contradictions, but, such as he is, he is still the greatest thing in his world, the eldest child of the gods.

To the romantic such a view seems mean and inadequate. He may agree that man is now such a thing as we have described, but he cannot accept this statement as final. To him man is, as it were, a prince in disguise, who may at any moment throw aside his rags and reveal himself in his true splendour. He and his world are capable of unlimited expansion and transformation. It would take us too far to attempt to assess the ultimate value and correctness of these rival views, though each would seem to have its own truth. Each, also, has its own danger. The classicist is apt to acquiesce too readily with things as they are, to accept a purely static view of the world, the romantic to drift away upon clouds of vague and comfortable optimism, to see man as he may become and to forget

present realities. But it can easily be seen that tragic poetry will tend to be classical, that this conception lies at the heart of the ballad and is, indeed the dominant note of the Middle Ages. Nor is it difficult to see why this must be so, since the rudeness of the prevailing mode of production made it impossible for man to control his environment and therefore impressed upon him a most rigorous sense of human limitations.

There is a strip of bare, hilly country, running from Newcastle to Edinburgh and from Berwick to Carlisle. Across it runs an ill-defined frontier. On each side a rough people, cattle graziers and cattle thieves, peasants and petty nobility, with one or two great families whose names recur constantly. Across this border a permanent guerilla war rages, criss-crossed with private vendettas which take no account of frontiers. A people hardy, independent, accustomed of necessity to the use of arms, loyal to their friends and treating every one else as enemies, in some ways barely emerging from the tribal form of society. Life for them is hard, poor, stirring, passionate, bloody, subject to sudden triumph and disaster. Man has to snatch with both hands at his luck and happiness and may only too often find himself stripped of both by evil fate. Fate seems to rule all things, and against his fate no man can prevail. In such a society man cannot afford to be romantic, to indulge in illusions about himself.

This is the country and the people of the ballads. It would be incorrect to describe such a society as classless, but there was a kind of rough equality since a man was what he was largely by virtue of the strength of his hands and the quickness of his wits. And even if class divisions existed, class oppression was much less evident than the universal oppression of harsh necessity, the prevailing poverty, the barrenness of the earth, the reiving

and raiding that were part of the life of a wild border country. Consequently, society was far more of a piece than anything we can well imagine to-day. Joys and fears, hopes and doubts, deeds and beliefs were largely common to all and the poetry in which these were expressed is therefore curiously democratic for all that it treats mainly, as was indeed inevitable, of the doings of outstanding figures. For these figures are, indeed, not merely outstanding but also typical, the expression of universal experience raised to a higher power. They represented the people in the same sort of way in which the king represented the people in the days when kingship was arising from tribal magic and tribal warfare.

Therefore the ballad was anonymous. We do not know the name of the author of even a single ballad and no one has ever succeeded in copying the ballad form in such a way that the forgery was not instantly obvious. Such is the anonymity of the ballad that we do not even know when or how it was composed. Scholars still debate, without any sign of reaching a conclusion, the question as to whether the ballads were the work of professional bards or of a sort of co-operative folk song-shop. Probably the truth lies somewhere between these extremes. Clearly there is a great difference between the spirit of the ballads and that of the earlier skald-made sagas, which were aristocratic in feeling and served to embody the traditions and pedigrees of the great families. And there is a homogeneity in ballad literature, a common spirit and style, which makes the greatest and the meanest ballads unmistakably akin and unmistakably different from any other thing on earth, and which can only be the result of a common shaping of familiar matter, a common experience of living. So that, as Professor Childe has said, "though they do not write themselves, though a man and not a people has composed them, still

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the author counts for nothing, and it is not by a mere accident, but with the best reasons that they have come down to us anonymous."

Perhaps we can most safely conclude that the bards who made the ballads were at least as close to the masses as they were to the nobility, that they worked, often, at familiar tales and told them in a style that had become obligatory, that the ballads quickly became common property, passing from mouth to mouth and, no doubt, both losing and gaining in the process, and that, in short, there was a sort of partnership between poet and people in which each partner was indispensable to the other. While we must agree that a man and not a people made the ballads, modern knowledge of, for example, cowboy songs, sea chanties and negro spirituals, gives grounds for supposing that the positive part played by the people in shaping ballad poetry may have been greater than was at one time imagined.

The result was, at the best, a great and democratic tragic poetry. There is of course a mass of ballads of little consequence, crude narratives which barely serve their original purpose of passing away a dull evening. But there is a residuum, perhaps twenty or thirty complete ballads and a quantity of scattered passages, stanzas and lines, which can bear comparison with any poetry in any language.

And first of all, as I have said, this is a tragic poetry, reflecting a life in which tragedy was never far distant. It has the austere, the classical regard for necessity, and no one is ever let off anything. Man is as he is and all his virtues as well as his vices are recorded and passed over and cannot turn from him his appropriate fate. In *Edom o'Gordon* there is a moment which raises the ballad from the rank of the better type of narratives of border

forays and places it alongside *Clark Saunders* and *Childe Waters*. Gordon had set fire to the house he was attacking and its lady had tried to drop her daughter over the wall to safety. Gordon killed her and then suddenly realised the horror of what he had done :

Then wi' his spear he turned her owre :
O gin her face was wane !
He said ' Ye are the first that e'er
I wished alive again.'

He turned her owre and owre again :
O gin her skin was white !
' I might have spared that bonny face
To hae been some man's delight.'

' Busk and bown, my merry men a'
For ill dooms do I guess,
I cannot look in that bonnie face
As it lies on the grass.'

Here, at its highest, is what the ballad can best do : a profound emotion and a completely visualised picture presented at the same time by the bare description of a couple of actions and a few quite ordinary words. The romantic poet might have been tempted to make this the centre of his theme : the classical, tragic poet of the ballad makes his point and passes on. Gordon's repentance and conviction of sin are accepted along with his violence and cruelty as part of a complex whole, and they cannot avert that fate which we feel with the poet to be just and necessary. Similarly, in *Jellon Grame*, it is Grame's one generous and pitiful act which finally brings about his destruction, and, again, we accept this as just and inevitable.

Pity and terror, joy and horror and pride are found everywhere in full measure in the ballads : but rarely, in the best period, contentment or disgust or resignation

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or sentimentality. The ballads accept life with all its misery and man with all his frailty, but they accept them heroically with a pride and a clear-eyed materialism which refuses to be satisfied with comfortable pretences and evasions. This pride and this clarity of vision can perhaps be best seen in the grandest of all the ballads, *Clark Saunders*. Here the tragedy of Saunders and Margaret moves steadily forward line by line from their deliberate sin to its punishment :

When in and came her seven brothers
Wi' torches burning bright :
They said, ' We hae but one sister,
And behold her lying with a knight ! '

to her sorrow and scornful defiance :

Then in and came her father dear ;
Said ' Let a' your mourning be :
I'll carry the dead corse to the clay,
And I'll come back and comfort thee.'

' Comfort weel your seven sons,
For comforted I will never be :
I ween 'twas neither knave nor loon
Was in the bower last night wi' me.'

Saunders' ghost comes to Margaret in the night :

' O cocks are crowing on merry middle earth,
I wot the wild fowl are boding day,
Give me my faith and troth again,
And let me fare upon my way.'

She does so, and then, at the conclusion, comes the strangest turn of all. Nothing, the poet seems to say, is absolute or eternal. Even tragedy has its end, love passes like sorrow and the heart cannot always remember.

' And fair Marg'ret and rare Marg'ret,
 And Marg'ret, o' veritie,
 Gin e'er ye love another man,
 Ne'er love him as ye did me.'

Rarely is there any deviation from the tragic pattern, and even when a happy ending is tacked on to the story it is of minor importance. *Childe Waters* and *Fair Annie*, almost alone among the great ballads have such endings and in each case what is important is the spirit and courage in which suffering and neglect are endured, and the happy ending is perhaps only a sort of accidental sequel to their triumph of spirit.

Ellen, in *Childe Waters*, is got with child, threatened with desertion and treated with every sort of unkindness. Her lover says scornfully :

' But my hounds shall eat of the bread of wheat,
 And you of the bread of bran ;
 And you shall curse the heavy hour
 That ever your love began.

' But my hound shall drink of the good red wine,
 And you of the water wan,
 And you will sigh and say, " Alas,
 That ever I loved a man ! " '

' O, I will drink of the wan water,
 And eat of the bread of bran ;
 And aye will I bless the happy hour
 That ever I loved a man.'

After this it seems irrelevant and even impertinent that Childe Waters should reconsider the matter and decide to marry her. The victory had been won already.

Similarly in *Fair Annie*, the story of the discarded mistress when her lover brings home a bride whose wedding feast she must prepare :

And aye she served the lang tables
 Wi' the white bread and the brown,
 And aye she turned her round about,
 Sae fast the tears ran down.

She took a napkin lang and white
 And hung it on a pin ;
 It was to wash away the tears,
 As she gaed out and in.

We have here no elaborate account of her feelings, that is not the way of the ballad : instead, the whole breaking of a heart is implied in one simple action.

This again is in the classical tradition, the tradition of restraint and simple direct statement, and the ballads are always concerned with the direct account of action, with brief and vivid pictures, with dialogue pared down to the bone. It is a hard way, deliberately eschewing ornament and imagery and many obvious effects, but followed to the end it has its own reward. What is lost in breadth is gained in intensity. In saying less than it appears to say the ballad succeeds in saying more. Words are used with such simplicity that they acquire unexpected subtleties. Out of the barrenness of diction an uncovenanted richness flowers : because nothing is wasted everything counts for more than itself.

I'll show you where white lilies grow
 On the banks o'Italie

or

(*The Daemon Lover*)

The carline queen was stark and strang
 She gar'd the door flee aff the ban

(*Cospatrick*)

or They brought him in to Carlisle Castle
 To be at my Lord Scrope's commands
(Kinmount Willie)

or 'Hold up, hold up, Lord William' she says
 'For I fear that you are slain'
 'Tis naething but the shadow of my scarlet cloak,
 That shines in the water sae plain'
(The Douglas Tragedy)

are typical examples in varying keys of this vivid richness in simplicity. And because, like all heroic poetry, the ballad is anonymous and unselfconscious it is able to secure effects with an ease which would otherwise be impossible.

At ilka tett o' her horse's mane
 Hung fifty sillar bells and nine.

Here the simple number and the word "silver" are all that is needed. Elsewhere words like "velvet," "gold" or "scarlet," which any poet to-day would think several times before using at all, and would probably only use in some rather unusual sense or context, are able to create an actually physical sense of magnificence. It is perhaps because such simple means suffice to produce such an atmosphere of magic (in the sense of conjuring up a world apparently governed absolutely by its own laws and logic) that the ballads so deceived Bishop Percy and have contrived to deceive multitudes in each succeeding generation.

We are all ready enough to be deceived in such matters. The world of the ballads is so alien to our own that we find it hard to grasp it as a living reality. It is easier to romanticise it, to invest it with a charm and a quaintness which never belonged to it. But so long as we continue to think of the ballads as quaint or charming or as having a mainly antiquarian interest, we shall fail to understand them, to our own great loss. We can *only* understand

them by approaching them as great poems in their own right, as being among the most splendid achievements of our nation. This is not, of course, to say that we must not approach them historically, must not try to discover the actual, historical world which they mirror. Like all poetry they reflect the age and place of origin from which they sprang, but not directly, not without distortion. The richness of the ballads, for example, is often a reflection of actual poverty (only to a poor community could the silver bells on the queen of Elfland's horse sound so impressive). The magic often reflects ignorance and a desperate effort to cheat fate by some ruse which the heart knows cannot succeed. The courtesy and fine manners often cloak a savage barbarity, as in the finely ironic ballad of *Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard*.

What the ballads show is not a rich or a glamorous or a highly cultured society, but one which is poor and wild and rude and bowed beneath the uncomprehended laws of necessity. But it is not an ignoble society. It is a society where life can exist at a high level of intensity, where the knowledge that no man can escape his fate makes all the more remarkable his resolution in meeting it unflinchingly. In the ballads we can see, if we will, both the special conditions which created them, and also that which is permanent and unchanging and peculiarly precious in men, their will to endure and to contend with their environment, even in circumstances in which the nature of things could seem to be most fittingly summed up in the epitaph of the dead mossrider :

Mony a one for him makes mane,
 But nane soll ken whar he is gane:
 O'er his white banes, when they are bare,
 The wind soll blaw for evermair.

Bacon's New Atlantis

AT no other time was there such a wealth of Utopian speculation in England as in the Seventeenth century. And at no time was this speculation at once so bold and practical and so dry and narrow. In this age of revolution Utopia comes closest to immediate politics and the everyday problems of government, and in doing so it loses as well as gains. Sir Thomas More, a century earlier, writing when the solid earth of the State was appearing from among the dividing waters of feudalism, had been concerned with the relation of wealth and poverty, with the abolition of classes, and, ultimately, with the questions of human happiness and social justice. The typical Utopian writers of the Seventeenth century were concerned with political questions in the narrow sense, with the framing of a model constitution and its working machinery, with the formation and character of governments and the perfection of parliamentary representation. They were concerned, in short, not so much with the problem of justice as with the problem of power.

As a result there is a complete change in temper and style. We find nothing to correspond to More's breadth of vision, his pity and anger, his tormenting doubts and the wry humour with which these doubts were expressed. Everything now is dry, precise and lawyer-like. There is a cool confidence, a bright, hard certainty that here, in Macaria or in Oceana, is the one true light, that here is a practical programme that need only be adopted to carry the revolution to its full perfection. And, to a very large extent, this confidence was justified, for the problem which had baffled and tormented More had been solved,

the bourgeoisie had won power, had the means of making their desires effective.

This change in the climate of Utopia corresponds exactly to the change in the English political climate. The Tudor absolutism gave the men of the new wealth the necessary shelter and breathing space in which to grow strong : ample advantage was taken of this opportunity, till, by the end of the Sixteenth century, the protection had ceased to be a necessity and the protector had become a burden. In alliance with the Crown the bourgeoisie had decimated the peasantry, humbled the Church, crushed Spain, traversed oceans and explored continents. Now, appearing for the first time in history as an independent force, they attacked the monarchy itself, deposed and beheaded a king and established a republic. For a brief space Utopia ceased to be a fiction but was felt by thousands to be just round the corner. If there were any limits to the power of this brave new class they were not immediately apparent.

Before the confident morning of the revolution there was a rather bleak dawn period, the generation in which the alliance between the Crown and the bourgeoisie was breaking, when the tension of events created bewilderment, weariness and disillusion. It was the period of Shakespeare's tragedies, the age when the bounding extravagance of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* had given place to the extravagant psychological horrors of Webster. To this period belongs Bacon's *New Atlantis*, and in the history of the English Utopia Bacon is the link connecting More with the utopian writers of the revolutionary period.

Like More, Bacon was a member of a family which was prominent in the service of the monarchy, was trained as a lawyer but combined the profession of law with a

continuing passion for philosophy, became Lord Chancellor of England, and, at the height of his fortunes, was disgraced and driven from office. Here, however, the parallel ends, for few men have been more dissimilar in their interests or character. There is perhaps no great English writer whose personality is less attractive than Bacon's, and all the elaborate apologetics of his many admirers and the power and sustained magnificence of his prose increase rather than diminish the distaste we feel in the presence of the man. Never was such a subtle and splendid intellect employed to serve meaner or more trivial ends, and neither pride nor gratitude nor loyalty to friends were ever allowed to brake his climb to wealth and influence. Grasping timidity and profuse display seemed continually to deny the austere impersonality of the philosopher's creed.

Yet this is only a part of the truth about Bacon : it would be quite wrong, I believe, to imagine that the philosophy was not sincere and profoundly felt. Partly, it may be, the very subtlety of the intellect deceived itself, but, more than that, Bacon's character expressed in a new form the essential contradiction within Humanism, the contradiction that lies at the very heart of the bourgeois revolution. Humanism fought to liberate mankind from superstition and ignorance, but also to liberate capitalist production from the restraints of feudal economy : the bourgeois revolution was waged for the ultimate advantage of mankind as a whole but also to secure for a new exploiting class the power to rob and to become rich, and in this revolution, meanness and nobility, cruel oppression and disinterested generosity are inextricably tangled. The pursuit of truth and the pursuit of wealth seemed often to coincide, and, whatever Bacon's faults may have been, about the pursuit of truth he was always passionately in earnest.

And truth for Bacon meant power, not indeed political power, since he was a loyal servant of the crown and well content with the existing order, but the power over nature through the understanding of natural law. This is the core of all his work, and not least of the *New Atlantis*, which, under cover of describing a utopian commonwealth is really a prospectus for a state endowed college of experimental science. It was the work of his old age, written when, over sixty, he was dismissed and ruined, but still hoping against all reason that he might be restored to office. It was a fragment only, begun and laid aside and never published in his lifetime. He began it in the hope that James I would adopt and subsidise his proposals : its incomplete state is the proof of the final abandonment of his hopes, and therefore of his interest in the work, since that interest was confined solely to its possible practical outcome.

Bacon, unlike More, was not concerned with social justice. He, too, was a Humanist, but by the beginning of the Seventeenth century Humanism had run cold : the difference between *Utopia* and *New Atlantis* is not so much a difference of content as a difference of purpose, a shift of interest and a lowering of temperature. The earlier Humanists had believed in reason and the possibility of the attainment of human happiness by the unfettered exercise of reason. Bacon and his contemporaries, while not denying the power of reason, had gradually shifted the weight of emphasis away from reason to experiment. As Bacon wrote :

“Our method is continually to dwell among things soberly . . . to establish for ever a true and legitimate union between the experimental and rational faculty.”

And elsewhere :

"For the wit and mind of man, if it work upon matter, which is the contemplation of the creatures of God, worketh according to the stuff and is limited thereby; but if it work upon itself, as the spider worketh its web, then it is endless, and brings forth indeed cobwebs of learning, admirable for the fineness of the thread and work, but of no substance or profit."

Bacon stood at the beginning of the first period of materialism, in which it was confidently believed that the whole universe, from the solar system to the mind of man, was a vast and complex machine and could be mastered absolutely by a sufficient understanding of the laws of mechanics. Bacon saw it as his task to use his prestige and his incomparable control over language to urge upon his contemporaries the undertaking of this final assault upon the mysteries of nature. As Basil Willey says in his admirable book *The Seventeenth Century Background*:

"Bacon's role was to indicate with fine magniloquence the path by which alone 'science' could advance. This he did, while other men, such as Galileo, Harvey or Gilbert, in whom he took comparatively little interest, were achieving great discoveries on the principles which he taught. Bacon's great service to 'science' was that he gave it an incomparable advertisement."

The information which we are given about the social and economic and political organisation of Bensalem, the utopian island of the *New Atlantis*, is therefore, as we might expect, meagre and indirect, since Bacon only intended the fiction to provide an interesting background for his pamphlet. But one cannot but be struck with the remarkable decline from the standpoint reached in *Utopia*, and, since Bacon had obviously read More's

book, this may be taken as an implied criticism in the points where they differ. Bensalem is a monarchy of the orthodox type, with the inevitable fixed constitution handed down from the founder-king, Salomona. It has private property and classes, as we have to infer from a passage which explains that on certain ceremonial occasions : " if any of the family be distressed or decayed, order is taken for their relief, and competent means to live." That is to say, that while the necessities of the poor are provided for, this is done as a charity and not as of right, and that the necessity for such charity appears normally to arise. Correspondingly there are marked social gradations and inequalities and the officials and leading citizens are distinguished by magnificent clothes and lavish display and have numbers of personal servants. Compare this with the Utopians among whom precious stones were the playthings of children and gold was used for the manacles of criminals.* There is a strongly patriarchal family system, quite unmarked by any trace of the Communism with which More tempered family life, and great power is enjoyed by the heads of these families and by the old generally.

Chance voyagers, like the narrators of the story, were welcomed in Bensalem and received hospitably, but intercourse with foreign lands was discouraged because King Salomona :

" recalling into his memory the happy and flourishing estate wherin this land then was, so as it might be a thousand ways altered to the worse, but scarce any one way to the better; thought nothing wanted to his noble and heroical intentions, but only, so far as

* We are reminded too that Aubrey says of Bacon, " None of his servants durst appear before him without Spanish leather boots; for he would smell the neates leather, which offended him."

human foresight might reach, to give perpetuity to what was in his time so happily established; therefore . . . he did ordain the interdicts and prohibitions which we have touching the entrance of strangers."

At the same time, as was fitting for a people given up to the search for knowledge, every effort was made to discover and import all that was known in other lands, and with this object secret missions were sent out at regular intervals to visit all civilised lands and bring back reports. What is of special interest here is the complete and characteristic absence of any relationship between advances in knowledge and technique and changes in social structure and relationships.

To Salomona, also, was credited the establishment of Salomon's (or Solomon's) House, whose "fellows" were the object almost of veneration among the Bensalemites. Here we come to Bacon's real point: *New Atlantis*, like Bensalem itself, exists only for the sake of it. And in nothing more than in his ideas about education does Bacon differ from and fall short of More. For More, education was a social and co-operative pursuit, with its object the increasing of the happiness and the enrichment of the personalities of the whole people: for Bacon, it was the private affair of a body of specialists, lavishly endowed by the state and carrying on their work in complete isolation from the masses. (We are told, for example, that the visit of one of the fathers of Salomon's House to the capital city was the first for a dozen years.) Its object was not happiness but power:

"The end of our foundation is the knowledge of the causes and secret motions of things and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible."

There is a kind of holy simplicity in this unbounded

belief in man's powers that is the most attractive side of Bacon and which makes him the truly representative man of his time; but this same simplicity limits his objectives to the quantitative and empirical; there is little in Bacon of the desire to pass beyond catalogue to synthesis, and he was a superb generaliser with a deep distrust of generalisation.

For this reason the methods of Salomon's House were purely experimental, and to the cataloguing of experiments Bacon devotes the ten happiest pages of *New Atlantis*, describing a great variety of metallurgical, biological, astronomical and chemical marvels, as well as the practical application of science to the making of new substances and fabrics, to medicine and even to engineering :

" We imitate also the flights of birds : for we have some degree of flying in the air : we have ships and boats for going under water. . . . We have divers curious clocks and other like motions of return, and some perpetual motions. We imitate also the motions of living things by images of men, beasts, birds, fishes and serpents."

Bacon hoped to interest King James, who prided himself upon his virtuosity and delighted to be called the "modern Solomon," in his scheme, and, no doubt, dreamed that the foundation of such a College of Science in England might lead to his return to public life and favour. In this he was disappointed, for James had little interest in science for its own sake and already the political struggle was curtailing the financial resources of the crown.* It was not till 1645, under the rule of the

* James is said to have remarked, upon the publication of Bacon's *Novum Organum* that " it is like the peace of God—it passes all understanding."

Long Parliament that Bacon's scheme assumed a modest practical form as the "College of Philosophy." Its founders, Samuel Hartlib, author of the Utopian essay *Macaria*, and the Czech scholar Comenius, both admitted that their scheme was inspired by *New Atlantis*. Similarly, when the College of Philosophy developed into the Royal Society in 1662 Sprat, Boyle, Glanville and others declared that this was only the carrying into effect of Bacon's outline of Salomon's House. Later still, it was among the main influences which determined the form to be taken by the work of the French Encyclopedists. Diderot, in the *Prospectus*, stated specifically :

" If we have come at it successfully, we shall owe most to the Chancellor Bacon, who threw out the plan of an universal dictionary of sciences and arts, at a time when, so to say, neither arts nor sciences existed. That extraordinary genius, when it was impossible to write a history of what was known, wrote one of what it was necessary to learn.

If, then, *New Atlantis* cannot be given a high place in the roll of the English Utopias, it is of the greatest importance both in the history of science and of the bourgeois revolution. The two are in fact closely connected, since the development of science and of industrial technique was an essential part of the advance of the bourgeoisie. Bacon, it may be said, pointed out the path that had to be taken, even though he may have been unwilling to travel it himself.

1941.

The Madness of Swift

IN writing about Swift it seems inevitable that we should begin at the end: we can forget the wit and the lionised pamphleteer; we pass mercifully over the years of exile; we will return presently to the Irish patriot, but the image which first occurs to our memory is that of the splendid machine thrown out of gear and racing itself to destruction. And, in some unexplained moment of clarity towards the close, composing the superb epitaph which stands to-day in St. Patrick's Cathedral:

"Here is laid" (I translate roughly) "the body of Jonathan Swift, where savage indignation will tear his heart no longer. Go hence, traveller, and imitate, if you can, one who always fought hard for human freedom."

Here, in the combination of the savage indignation (the force lies in the adjective at least as much as in the noun) and the fighter for human freedom, lies the essential truth and the essential contradiction about Swift. How are we to reconcile the man who wrote the *Drapier's Letters*

"to refresh and continue that *Spirit* so seasonably raised amongst you, and to let you see that by the Laws of GOD, of NATURE, of NATIONS and of your own country you ARE and OUGHT to be as FREE a People as your Brethren in *England*." (Swift's emphasis.)

with the man who declared through Gulliver that

"when I began to consider that by copulating with one of the *Yahoo* species I had become a parent of more, it

struck me with the utmost shame, confusion and horror . . . ”?

Yet reconciled they must be, and I think that a first step towards this reconciliation is an understanding of Swift’s madness.

On this subject the doctors and the psychologists have had much to say and their diagnosis is, no doubt, interesting and important—yet I think there is something else to be said. For Swift’s madness, like the madness of Ruskin, was not merely an individual pathological breakdown. It was also a social act, the final protest of a spirit that could protest no other way.

Swift was one of those rare persons, fortunate or unfortunate according to your point of view, who cannot deceive themselves, for whom injustice and oppression and cruelty *are* injustice and oppression and cruelty and not social necessities or the workings of inscrutable providence, and to whom the decent coverings with which most of us hide the truth about our world and our actions in it, are not only unconvincing but hateful, more hateful perhaps than the horrors they were intended to conceal.

“ Last week,” *he wrote*, “ I saw a woman flayed, and you will hardly believe how much it altered her person for the worse.”

Swift believed in justice and fair dealing : he found only injustice and oppression and the wicked flourishing like the green bay tree. Gradually he failed to see any hope of a remedy. He had followed a familiar path : like More he had attempted to instruct the rulers till a sudden turn in the political game had thrown him, a discredited exile, into his Dublin deanery. He had tried to arouse the decent and patriotic feelings of the Anglo-Irish

gentry till, convinced that they had neither, he wrote in his *Modest Proposal*—the ironic scheme for the ending of Irish poverty by the slaughter of the children of the peasantry for the tables of the rich—

“ I grant the food will be somewhat dear, and therefore very *proper for landlords* ” (Swift’s italics) “ who, as they have already devoured most of the Parents seem to have the best Title to the Children.”

And now, to whom should he go ? To the middle class ? Perhaps, for his campaign against Wood’s Halfpence had shown them not unresponsive. But he was too keen-sighted not to realise how limited was their power, either for good or evil. To whom then ? To the “ Savage old Irish ? ” That was unthinkable, they were too ignorant, too brutalised by ages of misery, and the only hope he could see for them, and that a poor one, was in a more enlightened policy by their masters and an end of the national oppression that was turning Ireland into a desert.

Every way was closed. Folly and wickedness ruled the world and nothing could be done about it. The hard fight was over, the savage indignation and the torn heart remained. Since indifference was impossible to Swift so long as his understanding held, the torment of the insoluble problem grew ever more unbearable till in the end the overtaxed mind slid over the edge into the abyss of madness. And Stella had died, Stella whom he had known and loved since she was a girl and he a brilliant unhappy young man in the house of Sir William Temple, Stella his pupil and friend and confidant. At this point Swift’s public and private problems meet and overlap one another. He was born to dominate, yet could not but despise those who submitted to his dominion ; he must have affection and applause, but struck out in savage

terror when those he loved sought closer contact or tried to invade his privacy. The Swift who rode the high horse with Bolingbroke and killed Vanessa with a look was the same as he who fought hard for the human freedom of the contemptible race of Yahoos.

Only Stella, Esther Johnson, was able to establish a firm and intimate relationship with him. And this only by a miracle of abnegation, patience and understanding, by a deliberate self-subordination and a refusal to make demands. He seems to have loved her as he loved no one else and there must have been moments in secret when he dreamed of an even closer relationship, only to recoil with the old, morbid horror of Gulliver "when I consider . . ." This horror also was an essential part of Swift's make-up, and if not the cause of his madness at least determined its character. But the madness has another notable feature. Because it was a social act as well as a morbid condition it tended, in the earlier stages at least, to sharpen his irony, to intensify his vision and even to strengthen his understanding. His social criticism, up to the point where a total disequilibrium was reached, became keener and deeper. This can easily be seen by a glance at the development of his work.

The first Swift (*Tale of a Tub* c. 1696) is a brilliant young man delighting in his power, almost indifferent to the thing said in the exuberance of its expression. This period may be said to end about 1708 with the pamphlet on *The Abolishing of Christianity in England*. Then comes the period of high politics, with *The Conduct of the Allies* (1711) as its peak. Here, it may be said, Swift was writing as a political hack of the Tories. In a superficial sense this is true, but we have to look a little below the surface. Swift's pen was never for sale and if he wrote for a Party it was because that Party, at that moment, seemed to stand for things which he passionately

believed. The Tory policy coincided with his hatred of war, which he believed to be incompatible with human dignity as a method of settling disputes, and with his strong dislike of the new power of the loan capitalists which the Revolution of 1688 had introduced into England :

" all that Sett of People who are called the *Monied Men* ; such as had raised vast sums by Trading with Stocks and Funds, and Lending upon great Interest and Praemiums ; whose perpetual Harvest is War, and whose beneficial way of Traffick must very much decline by a Peace."

If the reasons for Swift's dislikes were reactionary, the prejudices of an old-fashioned English gentleman who thought that the landed interest, upon which the prosperity of the country ultimately rested, was threatened by the Monied Men, the dislikes themselves and his expression of them were entirely honest and decent.

This career as a pamphleteer ended abruptly in 1714 when the death of Queen Anne ruined the Tory Party. He was forced to retire to Dublin—"the wretched dirty dog-hole and prison." For nearly ten years he brooded in silence, browbeating his Chapter and levying war upon the Irish Bishops mainly because they were his superiors and because he had been disappointed in his hopes of a mitre. His life seemed to be ended, but Swift, wherever he found himself, must fight and dominate and in the affair of Wood's Halfpence he found a new battlefield. In itself it was a small matter—the granting of a patent to an obscure individual to coin small change for Ireland and make a more than handsome profit thereby. But for Swift it raised the whole question of the nationhood of Ireland (by which he understood primarily the English in Ireland), a subject upon which he had already begun

to meditate, as witness his *A Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture, in Cloaths and Furniture of Houses, etc., Utterly Renouncing Every Thing Wearable that Comes from England* (1720). His famous exhortation to "burn everything English except their coals" makes him in a sense the father of De Valera's policy of Economic Nationalism.

Finally, with the *Modest Proposal* (1729) we enter the period of torment and approaching madness. Yet this pamphlet and *A Short View of Ireland* (1728) reach a new high point of social criticism. Here Swift contemplates the lot of the mass of the Irish peasantry. He compares Ireland to

"an Hospital, where all the Household Officers grew Rich, while the poor for whose sake it was built were almost starving for want of Food and Raiment."

Hereafter a decline begins, though there are still occasional flashes like the *Verses Upon the Death of Dr. Swift* (1731). But for the most part the periods of relative freedom from pain were spent in involved diatribes against servants or the composition of the Eighteenth century equivalents of crossword puzzles. From 1738 to his death in 1745 the breakdown is almost complete.

We can trace the same progression in a single masterpiece, *Gulliver's Travels*, which lies right across the central part of Swift's life. In such a work, which though short, sums up his whole outlook over twelve years, it would be vain to expect consistency, and it is much more valuable to disentangle the various strands and attempt to *explain* the inconsistencies. Here I am much in debt to Sir Charles Firth's brilliant paper *The Political Significance of Gulliver's Travels*.

The book as a whole is Swift's excursion into the realm of Utopia. Yet it is not one Utopia but four, and these

of very different kinds : negative, positive and mixed. The social criticism, that is to say, takes the form both of a direct satirical picture of human, and especially English and Irish, affairs, and of criticism by the construction of polities in which our errors are avoided. In some places these elements exist side by side and even seem to contradict one another.

Much of the First Book was written in 1714, before the retreat to Dublin. This is, comparatively, light-hearted fooling. How childish and little, Swift argues, are our political differences, our wars, our conception of human dignity and grandeur. In the main this is a *negative* Utopia, satirising in general terms the political life of England in which Swift was then immersed. But it was filled out about 1720 with two new elements, a veiled account of the fall of Bolingbroke written with a bitter hardness and an account of certain Lilliputian laws and customs relating especially to education and justice. These have a *positive* Utopian character quite inconsistent with the remainder of the Book : they are obviously an undigested afterthought.

The Third Book was also partly written in 1714 and these early chapters are again in lighter vein, satirising, in the projects of the Academy of Balnibarbi, Newton and scientists and philosophers in general. But later additions, born of an extended residence in Ireland, give a sombre background to the amiable follies of the Academicians :

“I never knew a soil so unhappily cultivated, houses so ill contrived and so ruinous, or a people whose countenance and habit expressed so much misery and want.”

Here is a description of contemporary Ireland, and for this misery Swift supplies the explanation—the exploita-

tion and domination of the country by the flying island of Laputa. The name, La Puta, means simply The Whore and expresses the relation of England to Ireland, in which the ruling country drains from the dependant all its wealth :

"whereby he can deprive them of the benefits of the sun and rain, and consequently afflict the inhabitants with death and disaster."

Finally, and I think this is clearly a late addition, this Third Book contains the revolting account of the Struldbrugs, the people who cannot die. Already the horror of living death was menacing Swift. Long before, he had said, "I shall be like that tree, I shall die at the top." He never feared death :

"It is impossible that anything so natural," *he had written*, "so necessary and so universal as death, should have been designed by providence as an evil to mankind."

But now he had come to look upon death with longing and would part from his friends with the words "Good night; I hope I shall never see you again." The fate which he dreaded, and which finally came upon him, was that of outliving his faculties, and of that he draws a picture "to arm our people (and himself ?) against the fear of death." This desire for death is also a part of the savage indignation of the fighter who realises that his struggle has been in vain.

To turn back to the Second Book is to enter a simpler and lighter world : it was written probably about or soon after 1720—well before the Fourth Book and the additions to the Third. Brobdingnag is not without some of the faults of grossness, but in the main it is a positive Utopia. It is a land of rough plenty, of well tilled fields and simple

laws, of peace and reasonable government and the antique virtues dear to Swift's Toryism. It was also a logical sequel to Lilliput and not only because the scale of measurement is precisely inverted: in Lilliput Swift insisted upon the littleness of man, and this theme is repeated when the King of Brobdingnag declares:

"I cannot but conclude the bulk of your natives to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth."

But Swift has not yet despaired of his kind. The moral of this Second Book seems to be that man would do well enough if he were bigger—mentally, morally and spiritually as well as bodily—and that a return to a simpler life in which honest yeomen cultivated the soil and honest tradesmen and citizens supplied their needs would provide a sufficiency of happiness.

In the Fourth Book Swift explicitly abandons this position. The Utopia here is a non-human one, a polity of horses. As if to say that mere size is of no account, that man is beyond all hope and that only a totally new species will serve. The Utopia of horses is a moral Utopia, marked by its extreme simplicity, so that already we seem to be treading on the ground of the Rousseau-esque Romantics, returning not only to the noble savage but beyond him into a more biologically specialised world. The horse is nobler than man because he has fewer wants, less organisation, has not developed a civilisation in which vices are inevitable. The Houyhnhnms eat only oats and milk, do not understand the nature of a lie and their culture is roughly parallel with that of the Neolithic Age. They have further, and this bears directly upon Swift's own peculiarities, a curious coldness in their personal relationships: they have benevolence but not affections:

"they have no fondness for their colts or foals, but the care they take in educating them proceeds entirely from the display of reason. . . . Courtship, love, presents, jointure, settlements, have no place in their thoughts . . . the young couples meet and are joined merely because it is the determination of their parents and friends."

In case there should be any mistake this coldly perfect society is contrasted directly with the beastliness of the Yahoos, the degenerate representatives of the human race. Here we are again in the world of the *Modest Proposal*, for the Yahoos are not only man in general but the "savage old Irish" in particular, the product of centuries of want, oppression and ignorance. Once again, Swift had been using his eyes. He had seen the peasants :

"who pay great Rents, living in Filth and Nastiness upon Butter-milk and Potatoes, without a Shoe or Stocking upon their Feet, or a House so convenient as an *English Hog-sty* to receive them." (*Short View*)

Yet the Irish, unlike the Yahoos, are not degraded by nature or beyond hope, and Swift at this time reaches the greatest clarity as to the causes of their condition :

"these defects, wherever they happen, arising only from the poverty and slavery they suffer from their inhuman neighbours, and the base and corrupt spirits of too many of the chief gentry. . . . The millions of oppressions they lie under, the tyranny of their landlords and the general misery of the whole nation have been enough to damp the best spirits under the sun."

Irish poverty, like her other troubles, was not inevitable, but Swift began to despair of preaching remedies.

In the *Modest Proposal* he writes bitterly :

"Therefore let no man talk to me of other Expedients : of taxing our Absentees at five Shillings a pound : of using neither cloaths nor household Furniture, except what is of our own Growth and Manufacture . . . of being a little Cautious not to sell our Country and our Consciences for nothing : of teaching Landlords to have at least one degree of Mercy towards their Tenants. Lastly of putting a Spirit of Honesty, Industry and Skill into our Shopkeepers.

He was even able, at times, to look objectively at his own rage and despair, as when he wrote to Bolingbroke in 1729 :

"I find myself disposed every year, or rather every month to be more angry and revengeful ; and my rage is so ignoble that it descends even to resent the folly and baseness of the enslaved people among whom I live."

How nearly Swift, as the shadows begin to close upon him, becomes an Irish patriot instead of an Anglo-Irish one !

But the shadows *were* closing, and this is best seen in the dual nature of his Yahoos : the two themes, that of the Irish patriot condemning national oppression and that of the misanthrope in despair before the folly and wickedness of the human race are now so interwoven that neither we nor Swift can say where one begins and the other ends. His fight for human freedom was nearly over : he could see little around him but ruin and disaster, yet he did not abandon the struggle so long as his sanity remained.

To-day the same battle continues, but we have a hope and a confidence which Swift never knew, so that our fight is easier than his. To fight with victory clear

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before us is a light thing—to fight without expectation of victory, without even the possibility of victory, was the work of a superman, and the miracle of Swift is not that he was maimed and maddened in the struggle, but simply that he fought.

1943.

Mr. Crusoe and Mr. Gulliver

No documentary evidence has survived, but it is hard not to believe that Mr. Crusoe was one of that "concourse of curious people" who visited Mr. Gulliver's house at Rotherhithe in or about the year 1715. The two greatest travellers of the age must surely have met somewhere, and Mr. Crusoe, though well on in his eighties, was not the kind of man to miss any chance of investigating a marvel. Yet the meeting can hardly have been satisfactory to either party. Even if Mr. Gulliver had so far overcome his prejudice against the Yahoo race as to allow himself to be interviewed, the older traveller with his ingrained matter-of-factness must have found some of the details of Mr. Gulliver's adventures hard to accept. Horses, indeed, might somewhere be found capable of reason, but could the most reasonable of horses thread a needle? And Mr. Gulliver, so well known for his inability to speak the thing that is not, would doubtless resent the faintest reflection upon the absolute truth of any of his narrations.

It may be for this reason that the meeting passed unrecorded, that both parties preferred to be silent about a total failure to establish contact in any common basis of experience. For certain it is that no two men, so superficially similar, can have travelled the earth at roughly the same time and discovered two earths so entirely different. At first sight the similarities are most striking :

" My father had a small estate in Nottinghamshire ; I was the third of five sons. . . . "

" I was born in the year 1632 in the City of York of a good

family. . . . Being the third Son of the Family, and not bred to any trade, my Head began to be filled very early with rambling Thoughts. . . .”

Who, without referring to the books, will be certain which was Crusoe and which was Gulliver?

Indeed, two more ordinary Englishmen of the middle class it would be hard to find: this ordinariness is in fact the guarantee of the absolute truth of what they have to tell us about themselves. And these two ordinary men shared an unexplained passion, a compulsion one might almost say, for roving, for seeking their fortunes at the corners of the earth; which, also, was a characteristic common to thousands of the younger sons of middle class English families in the Seventeenth century and since. And both of them left us narratives of their voyages that are monuments of plain, honest, middle-class English prose—yet the things they have to tell us are farther removed than the poles, as remote from each other as earth from heaven or as earth from hell. It may be worth our while to enquire into the reasons for this.

Perhaps at this point it is time to stop pretending, to admit that Mr. Crusoe and Mr. Gulliver are not real persons, but creatures of the imagination, the creations respectively of Daniel Defoe, dissenting merchant, journalist and Citizen of London, and of the Rev. Jonathan Swift, Vicar of Laracor and later Dean of St. Patrick's in Dublin. What they have to discover for us is simply the two worlds as seen by the two supreme writers of the final period of the bourgeois revolution in England. We should therefore begin by clearing our minds as to what exactly was involved in the “Revolution” of 1688 and what it meant for Defoe and for Swift.

Strictly speaking, it was not a revolution at all. The decisive shift of power had happened a generation earlier when Cromwell and the New Model Army had proved in practice that the bourgeoisie, when it chose to put forth its power, was the strongest force in the State. The Restoration of 1660 had not disproved this: it had merely established a working compromise based on the existing strengths of the various propertied classes, and the "Revolution" of 1688 only marked the defeat of a reactionary and foredoomed attempt to upset this compromise. It is true that 1688 was not an exact return to the 1660 situation, because in the meantime the balance of forces had somewhat changed. But it is equally true, and far more important, that it was not a true revolution in the sense that power was transferred from one class to another.

Its effect was to increase the wealth and influence of the merchants and manufacturers, to develop rapidly Banking, the National Debt and all the machinery of large-scale financial operations, to create the conditions for the opening of a world market for English goods and for a widespread colonial empire, and, in the long run, for the complete destruction of the peasantry and for the coming of the industrial revolution.

Defoe may, without exaggeration, be called the representative man of 1688. Twice he was under arms: first in the ill-fated Monmouth rising and afterwards when William of Orange landed at Torbay. William was to him the Protestant Hero, the model of a people's king, the guarantor of civil and religious liberties, the Saviour of England from "Popery and Wooden Shoes." However Defoe's exact party alignment might alter in the shifting of the extremely complicated political struggles of the next twenty-five years, his guiding line was an absolute adherence to the principles of 1688. That is

to say, in general, Defoe was a Whig, even if his views did not always coincide with those of the leaders of the Whig Party at any given moment. He was a satisfied acceptor of the existing compromise.

Equally, and equally in spite of similar reservations, Swift was a Tory. He accepted 1688—the point about 1688 was that *everyone* accepted it except a handful of irreconcilables—but he accepted it grudgingly and with regret. He was an *unsatisfied* acceptor. More clearly than Defoe, who saw only the surface features—the triumph of civil and religious liberty and the prospect of increasing trade and prosperity—Swift understood the deeper implications and disliked them exceedingly. He distrusted the new power of wealth, saw in the Bank of England only an instrument of misgovernment, foresaw in the rise of capitalism the impoverishment of the countryside. Above all, he hated the new policy of colonial expansion and the brutal methods by which it was brought about. So Gulliver excuses himself for having neglected to annex any of his discovered lands :

“ To say the truth, I had conceived a few scruples with regard to the distributive justice of princes upon these occasions. For instance, a crew of pirates are driven by a storm they know not whither ; at length a boy discovers land from the topmast ; they go ashore to rob and plunder ; they see a harmless people, are entertained with kindness, they give the country a new name. . . . Here commences a new dominion acquired with a title of *divine right*. Ships are sent with the first opportunity ; the natives are driven out or destroyed, their princes tortured to discover their gold ; a free licence given to all acts of inhumanity and lust, the earth reeking with the blood of its inhabitants : and this execrable crew of butchers employed in so

pious an operation, is a *modern colony* sent to convert and civilize an idolatrous and barbarous people."

And he adds, with an irony even more telling and characteristic than his indignation :

" But this description, I confess, doth by no means affect the British nation, who may be an example to the whole world for their wisdom, care and justice in planting colonies."

Swift, we must remember, by the time this was written, had begun to feel and to write as an Irishman, and Ireland, England's first colony, had experienced every horror of colonisation even within the memory of men then alive. He was writing, moreover, in a country ruined, enslaved and devastated, which was reached by none of the profits and blessings of the " Glorious Revolution " of 1688. Defoe, on the contrary, was English of the English, and England at the beginning of the Eighteenth century was in many ways a tolerable place to live in. For the merchants and manufacturers and substantial farmers it was more than tolerable. Profits were high, there was a steady increase in material prosperity, all the values by and for which they stood were clearly in the ascendant. And even for the lower classes, with all the filth, brutality and squalor which certainly existed, there was in the main a rough security such as they had not enjoyed, for example, under the Tudors, and would certainly not enjoy once the Industrial Revolution and the new wave of Enclosures were fairly started. So that Defoe may well be excused a certain smugness as he travelled up and down the country noting the growth of towns and the well tilled fields, the new houses and workshops rising everywhere, the yearly increasing fleets leaving the harbours.

Defoe was not only an Englishman, but also a typical bourgeois of the best type, with the characteristic bourgeois merits and shortcomings. Honest, straightforward, independent, industrious (his amazing literary output amid a life of the most varied activities is equalled only by that of Cobbett), genuinely pious in a matter of fact way, apt to mistake the surface appearance for the reality, ready to accept as absolute truth and justice that which accorded with the interests of his class, declaring wealth to be unimportant and the "middle station" the only true happiness, yet never missing a legitimate opportunity to make money, he was, in his personal life and character, the exact replica which he claimed to be of his own Crusoe.

Crusoe is the essential bourgeois man, both on and off his island. To take one revealing example, his attitude to land. For him, and we must remember this was a relatively new standpoint, land was property, simply and absolutely. So naturally he regards himself as king, or, more properly, owner of his island, whether resident or no. When he was rescued he left behind him a number of men—Spaniards and English—who at first cultivated parts of the island communally. When he returned some years later he found that various difficulties had arisen and

"that there might not be quarrels afterwards about this situation . . . I caused to be drawn up and signed and sealed by them . . . setting out the Bounds and Situation of every Man's Plantation, and testifying that I gave them thereby severally a right to the whole Possession and Inheritance of their respective Plantations . . . reserving all the rest of the Island as my own property and a certain Rent for every particular Plantation after eleven Years."

What was done, in fact, was something very like both the plantation of a Colony and an Act of Enclosure.

If Defoe was typically English and bourgeois, Swift was equally, if less typically, Irish and aristocrat. His social origins, as member of a family of country clergy, were those of an adherent of the aristocracy, and Swift's early years as secretary to Sir William Temple were entirely in this tradition. But Swift himself was no man to be a hanger-on to the great—he had the temper and quality of a genuine aristocrat and soon asserted his claims to be regarded as a power in his own right. His imperiousness, his pride, the patriarchal relations he established with his servants, his friends and, finally, with the whole people of Ireland, his extravagant generosity which was largely a desire to appear out of the clouds as a godlike benefactor (though he was capable also of an extreme delicacy on occasions), his very buffoonery, were all aristocratic qualities, as were his misery and despair in an age when the aristocracy had lost its monopoly of power and was only able to survive by accepting the new social order and itself becoming bourgeois. This was something that Swift, more aristocratic than the aristocracy in his self-made grandeur, could never bring himself to do, so that he suffered in his person the whole historic doom which in the case of his class was mitigated and transformed.

Since Defoe and Swift *were* Crusoe and Gulliver, it is now possible, I think, to see that the wandering impulse which drove them around the world was by no means the same, but, rather, exactly opposite.

Crusoe's restlessness was that of an advancing capitalism. He went out, as thousands actually did, to explore and exploit the world now lying open. He was the rugged individualist, blazing trails and founding

colonies, always seeking new avenues of profit. And what he sought he found because it was actually there. Further, what he found was exactly what he left behind, the thrusting bourgeois England of his age which he carried with him and extended over the face of the earth, the world where the industrious, practical man will always succeed, the bourgeois God who helps those who help themselves. Till in the end he returns to his starting point, old and satisfied with himself and his world, but still untired, and preparing for that death which for him is only "a longer journey than all these."

Gulliver, too, is driven out by an inner compulsion. For him, as for Swift, the England he has known, if only in imagination, is dead and finished. He wanders aimlessly, hoping that what has been destroyed at home may exist beyond the seas. But he is seeking for a dream, for a past which even as a past is an illusion. So, though no sea is untravelled and no land unexplored, he too finds, since Swift was the most honest and historically sensitive of writers, nothing but what he left at home. He finds not security and happiness but only a darkness peopled with uncouth forms and the pit of hell opening under his feet at each new step.

1943.

Charles Churchill: the Bear with the Ragged Staff

THOSE to whom Churchill is known at all will perhaps remember him best as he appears in Hogarth's print: "The Bruiser, C. Churchill, (once the Rev.) in the Character of a Russian Hercules, regaling himself after having killed the monster Caricatura, that so sorely galled his virtuous friend, the heaven-born Wilkes." Here he is depicted as a bear, shambling but powerful, clothed in tattered finery with the remains of a clerical gown hanging from his shoulders, holding a pot of ale in one hand and a huge club in the other.

Hogarth was an angry man when he worked on that portrait, for his unscrupulous and unprovoked attack on Wilkes, at the moment when Wilkes stood for all that was free and honest in English politics, had drawn from Churchill a satire of sustained and crushing ferocity:

Virtue, with due contempt, saw Hogarth stand,
The murderous pencil in his palsied hand.
What was the cause of Liberty to him,
Or what was Honour? let them sink or swim,
So he may gratify, without control,
The mean resentments of his selfish soul.
Let freedom perish; if to freedom true
In that same ruin Wilkes may perish too.

But even in the heat and fury of one of the most savage literary gang-wars of a savage age Hogarth remained an artist of genius and his portrait contains not a little of the essential truth both as to the outer man and to his quality and equipment as a writer. This truth Churchill

himself was ready to admit. In *Independence*, one of the last and strongest of his poems, he must have had Hogarth's caricature in his mind when he wrote of himself as :

A bear, whom, from the moment he was born
 His dam despised, and left unlicked in scorn. . . .
 Vast were his bones, his muscles twisted strong :
 His face was short but broader than 'twas long ;
 His features, though by nature they were large,
 Contentment had contrived to overcharge,
 And bury meaning, save that we might spy
 Sense lowering in the penthouse of his eye.

This is a true picture of a man, who, whatever his faults, rarely deceived himself, and his work bears the same character : breadth, contentment, strong sense go far to make good the absence of subtlety or the higher sort of imagination. Perhaps it may seem a paradox that the work of a satirical poet should be marked by contentment, but Churchill's satire always springs from a genuine, impersonal indignation against folly and corruption or from a joyful and exuberant acceptance of battle for its own sake and is never the mere projection of his own personal unhappiness. His weapon *was* the club, but he learnt to use it with the same sort of dexterity that others could achieve only with the rapier, perhaps because he was so strong that in his hands the club felt light.

And he lived in a time when the club was in fact the appropriate weapon for a poet who was also a radical. It was an age of extreme corruption employed by second-rate men for second-rate ends. A time when, in his own words, "the damned aristocracy is gaining ground in this country" at the very moment when it was losing all claims to be called an aristocracy, when it was becoming

bloated, money-bound and utterly vulgar, the moment when the *beverage* was visibly and unmistakably coming to birth.

The arrival of the *beverage* (a phenomenon closely connected with the growth of colonial exploitation) produced special problems for the writer. Patronage was ending, the "great reading public" had not yet appeared. What patronage still remained was such as no self-respecting poet could endure. In *Independence*, the poem in which he most truly flayed the "damned aristocracy," Churchill shows a keen awareness of what was happening, as well as an understanding of the disadvantages that had always attended patronage even at its best :

Patrons in days of yore were men of sense,
Were men of taste, and had a fair pretence
To rule in letters—some were even heard
To read off-hand and never spell a word. . . .
Our Patrons are of quite a different strain,
With neither sense nor taste : against the grain
They patronise for fashion's sake—no more—
And keep a bard just as they keep a whore.

In the age of Bute and Sandwich the poet without private means had but one alternative. Either to become utterly servile and null, or to stand completely on his own feet and hold his ground against all comers. The situation that had existed in the time of Dryden and Swift, when to a certain limited extent, the poet could accept patronage and still preserve his personal and poetic integrity, was past. Almost alone in his generation Churchill chose the way of struggle and independence.

It was not an easy world to be born into for one, as he was, outside the circle of privilege. His father was a poor parson : he himself was thrust early into a church

in which the unprivileged could only make a way by life-long and unremitting belly-crawling. For Churchill his profession meant either this or to "pray and starve on forty pounds a year." We need not doubt that his enemies were speaking from observed fact when they declared that he was often compelled

"to duck into a cellar in St. Giles' where the knives and forks were chained to the table for fear the company should steal them, and there dine sumptuously upon ox-cheek."

He liked neither the duties of a parson nor the conditions under which those duties had to be performed, and in 1761 he quite deliberately abandoned them to commence poet with a satire upon actors which was instantly successful beyond all possible expectation.

A year later he met John Wilkes, just beginning his agitation for the freedom of the press, free elections and democratic liberty that heralded the profounder agitations which accompanied the French Revolution. The two men joined forces and much of the best and strongest writing in *The North Briton* was Churchill's. It was a happy partnership and in it Churchill found his real vocation and his opportunity. In the few years that remained before his death in 1764 at the age of 33, his output was remarkable both in quality and quantity. Certainly it was limited in range, but he characteristically preferred to stick to what he found was his true medium rather than to experiment. In this preference are shown both his limitations and the self-knowledge that was one of the main sources of his strength. Poem after poem appeared in the next two years : *The Prophecy of Famine*, attacking Scotland because the arch-enemy, Bute, was a Scot, *Gotham*, attacking the abuse of royal power, *The Candidate*, attacking the rat Sandwich :

Observe his follies well, and you would swear
Folly had been his first, his only care ;
Observe his vices, you'll that oath disown,
And swear that he was born for vice alone.

Never, since Swift was driven out of date had any poet possessed both the courage and the ability to "maul a minister of state" in this style. And if Churchill was a lesser poet and a smaller man than Swift, if he lacked that fierce, concentrated venom or the despair for the human race that sprung from a passionate and frustrated love, he was Swift's equal in courage and in some other respects held advantages that made his satire more immediately effective. He was closer to normal human life, he spoke the language and thought the thoughts of common men easily and as a matter of course, and not by virtue of a supreme act of the imagination such as produced the *Drapier's Letters*. He wrote out of a composed and not a tormented self, not in isolation but as one of a company of fellow fighters, and what he wrote was therefore more objective and therefore closer to the mind of the time. If he had been told that for these very reasons Swift would have a thousand readers in a century's time to every one of his, he would doubtless have laughed and replied that that was no concern of his : he wrote to plague the damned aristocracy and to earn a living.

It would be absurd to pretend that he was, or ever wished to be thought, a great poet. He will never be the object of a cult but he deserves to be read and to be remembered with honour as a poet of integrity and wit who enlisted in the army of freedom and never flinched from the struggle. In a corrupt age he was incorruptible, and it is this incorruptibility, as much as his rough dexterity which lifts his verse well above mediocrity.

He is worth reading to-day not so much for what he had to say as for what he was.

His ideas, as a matter of fact, were the least important thing about him. They were exactly those of other honest, decent and well-informed men of the second half of the eighteenth century. He believed in democracy but not too much of it, in reason but also in revealed religion, in justice and fair dealing between men without understanding that injustice is the oppression of class by class. He shows very little consciousness of the existence of a class struggle at all, and, indeed, his democracy consisted largely in a total disregard for class distinctions that forced him to assert that a lord or a bishop was no way different from any commoner. He hated the pretentious hypocrites who dominated the Established Church, and in his lines on Bishop Warburton he fixed the type unforgettably :

He was so proud that should he meet
 The Twelve Apostles in the street,
 He'd turn his nose up at them all
 And shove his Saviour to the wall. . . .
 A Christian without faith or works,
 As he would be a Turk 'mongst Turks ;
 A great divine, as lords agree,
 Without the least divinity ;
 To crown all, in declining age,
 Inflamed with church and party rage,
 Behold him, full and perfect quite,
 A false saint and true hypocrite.

It would be unfair, however, not to mention Churchill's condemnation of the barbarities inflicted upon the peoples of the East by Europeans in search of profits. In his time these barbarities were easily accepted by many radicals, including his friend Wilkes, or, if denounced,

were denounced as they were by Burke, for purely party reasons. Churchill had no such hidden ends, and his lines in *Gotham* have a fine and generous sincerity :

Happy, thrice happy, *now* the savage race,
Since Europe took their gold and gave them grace !
Knowledge she gives, enough to make them know
How abject is their state, how deep their woe ;
The worth of freedom strongly she explains,
While she bows down and loads their necks with chains ;
Faith too, she plants, for her own ends imprest,
To make them bear the worst and hope the best ;
And while she teaches, on vile interest's plan,
As laws of God the wild decrees of man,
Like Pharisees, of whom the Scriptures tell,
She makes them ten times more the sons of Hell.

It has doubtless all been said before and since. The point is that it is well said and cannot be said too often. The style, perhaps, is outmoded, the ideas have long ago lost their freshness, even the neat and telling language may be dismissed as machine-made eloquence. But what endures is the downright outspokenness, the refusal to be silenced, the determination at all costs to speak the truth as it appears to the poet. "The true poet must be truthful" and across the years our true poets will recognise in Churchill a comrade.

Literary fashions change and the highly conscious nobility and fine sentiment of the eighteenth century is no longer altogether to our taste, but the fashion is not what matters and the critic has the right as well as the duty of looking beneath it for the naked man, the man who speaks to us direct as well as to his own generation. And in the case of Churchill there is not really so far to look and for all the differences of our idiom we cannot

but feel very close to the poet who declares to all " half patriots " that :

When brave Occasion bids, for some great end,
When Honour calls the poet as a friend,
Then shall they find that e'en at danger's brink
He dares to speak what they scarce dare to think.

1940.

The Last Puritan

WILLIAM HALE WHITE, better known as Mark Rutherford, was born the heir to a very honourable and peculiarly English tradition, the tradition of dissenting Radicalism. His grandfather, "a radical and almost a republican" had had his windows smashed for refusing to illuminate them in honour of victories over the French. A year after Rutherford himself was born, his father's house was attacked by a Tory mob in the stormy Reform Bill election of 1832.

Isaac Allen in *The Revolution in Tanner's Lane* is drawn from Rutherford's father, a bookseller in the little Tory town of Bedford, and one of the many half-forgotten heroes who never spared himself and who thought no risk too great in the fight for civil and religious liberty. His influence was, I think decisive in moulding the temperament and genius of his more famous son.

But if Rutherford was born into a great tradition, it was one that was already in full decline, even though it could still inspire isolated individuals to lives of courage and usefulness. The heroic age of Calvinist Puritanism, the age of Cromwell and the Levellers, was indeed long gone. Calvinism was, after all, the faith of the bourgeoisie in its revolutionary period, and with the passing of that period, the partial success of the Revolution and the opening of an era of complex and sordid compromises between the various sections of the exploiting classes, its character changed accordingly. In the eighteenth century English Nonconformity sank into a torpor which it shared with all other political and religious faiths. The French Revolution and the early struggles of the

proletariat brought it to a brief revival that was yet the prelude to a final decline.

Even Methodism, in spite of the political orthodoxy of its founders, assumed a revolutionary aspect in the harsh life of the north country towns. Once more in England the enemies of the people were Amalakites and Philistines, while the hungry, ragged Luddites and Blanketeers were inspired by memories of the sword of the Lord and of Gideon and by tales of the days when God had raised up a few poor men to save a nation.

Something of this feeling is communicated in the terrific sermon preached by Mr. Bradshaw in *The Revolution in Tanner's Lane* on Jephthah's vow, in which the deliverance of Israel from Ammon is clearly an image of the political struggle. Probably Rutherford had himself heard that sermon or something like it from the Welsh preacher Caleb Morris, a man whose few recorded addresses still ring with a genuine passion even in the unsightly pamphlets in which they have been preserved.

Yet Nonconformity could never again free itself from the thick respectability that had overtaken it, nor was Calvinism, with its aristocratic doctrine of election, a suitable ideology for the new forms of struggle in which the exploited, unprivileged masses were more and more coming to the front. The gospel according to Calvin had less and less meaning for men living in the dawn of the proletarian revolution and of the age of applied science.

Year by year the issues of this class struggle became clearer and drove men to find new comradeships, new beliefs and new ways of expressing them. Mark Rutherford traces this process at work in Zachariah Coleman, the hero of *The Revolution in Tanner's Lane*:

"The reasons that drove him to alter his mind were, in the first place, the piety, methodistic most of it, which was then mixed up with politics; and secondly, a growing fierceness of temper, which made the cause of the people a religion. From 1816 downwards it may be questioned whether he would not have felt himself more akin with any of his democratic friends, who were really in earnest over the great struggle, than with a sleek half-Tory professor of the gospel, however orthodox he might have been."

As time went on, the Nonconformist churches lost their followers both to left and right. Their more prosperous adherents drifted into the respectability of the established church and the workers into the free thought of indifferentism which developed alongside political radicalism, till they were composed mainly of those who had no social pretensions or who were too poor in spirit to be class conscious.

At the same time, the Calvinist doctrines that had once inspired men to action were either whittled away or became barren dogmas mechanically expounded and quite powerless to influence the lives of those professing them. No clearer indication of this change is possible than by a comparison between Rutherford and the other great Puritan writer, his fellow townsman John Bunyan. In Bunyan all is clear and precise. The way to the Celestial City runs indeed through slough and snare, but straight as a ruled line. The walls of Mansoul may be assaulted and even stormed, but they rise sheer out of the surrounding plain and there are no suburbs in which a man might live, doubtful whether or not he was a true citizen.

Rutherford's books are full of hesitation and half tints. Like Bunyan, for they both *were* Puritans, his

concern is man's pilgrimage and the statement of religious truth in terms of human experience. But his pilgrims travel by devious ways towards a City that quite possibly does not exist at all, and the religious truth that once served has become so empty of meaning that only the most desperate struggle can bring it into touch with human life.

It is this theme of a great tradition in decline that is the real subject matter of all his best work. Growing up in the middle of the century, when the decline was far advanced, he was too honest and too wise not to be aware of it. He felt profoundly the absence of roots in the world into which he had been born.

"The facts of life," *he wrote*, "for most of us are a dark street, crowds, hurry, commonplaceness, loneliness and worse than all, a terrible doubt, which can hardly be named, as to the meaning and purpose of life."

All his work is a search for a new life, a political and religious compromise that could replace the old certainty that had gone for ever. And because he could never quite bring himself to abandon the old, to accept the materialism and socialism which were the logical answer to his questionings, he never arrived at any answer that could bring him lasting peace.

He came in the end to think that the ways of God were inscrutable, to a stoicism which declared that salvation, in the sense of man finding himself at one with his surroundings, was for the few, to a curious humanistic interpretation of Calvin's doctrine of election that summed itself up in a conviction that the Lord will have mercy upon whom he will have mercy. But he never deceived himself into thinking that there was more than a provisional truth in any of his solutions.

Politically it was much the same. He believed in the people, but less in the people as they actually appeared to him, ignorant, easily misled, uncertain and brutalised by oppression, than in a people of the future, to whom a remnant, a little band of the elect, pointed the way. He felt that no sacrifice could be too great to bring this future even the smallest step nearer. And even for the people as they actually were he had a real affection and respect. With all their faults they seemed to him infinitely preferable to their cultured, corrupt and selfish rulers.

I think it was just because he refused to be comforted, refused to accept any easy and specious solutions, never professed any final certainty that he could not really feel, that his work is so valuable for us. He ended an age. He proved beyond all reasonable doubt that some roads were closed. He made it unnecessary for anyone else to go through just the same kind of mental struggle and torment that he endured. He really was the last Puritan.

So far as any man may he has told us the whole truth about himself and his world and it is this honesty that makes him not only a significant figure but a great novelist. For when you know the whole truth about any one thing you can know the whole truth about anything. And not before. It may seem a very petty world, this of shopkeepers and small farmers and mechanics in sleepy country towns, but because it is perfectly focussed and complete in every detail it opens the way to an understanding of the wider world that is only implied in it.

Its men and women are real people and are not only at home in it but could be transferred to any other world without losing their reality. Which is perhaps another

way of saying that Rutherford had a remarkable sense of the uniqueness of the ordinary and the unlimitable importance of the common man :

"It might be thought that there was no romance in Cowfold. There could be no greater mistake. The history of every boy or girl of ordinary make is one of robbery, murder, imprisonment, death sentence, filing of chains, scaling of prison walls, recapture, scaffold, reprieve, poison and pistols ; the difference between such a history and that in the authorised version being merely circumstantial."

Cowfold is the territory of most of Rutherford's best work, of *Catharine Furze*, for example, the most moving if not the greatest of his novels, and of the *Autobiography*, that fascinating blend of the true and the might be true. The rich, quiet scenery of the Eastern Midlands, with its slow, willow-fringed rivers, the market towns where "the fields came up to the gardens and orchards at the back of half the houses, and flowed like an inundation into the angles of the streets," the life that centred round shop, chapel and large meals taken at regular intervals, the flat lands where earth, sky and water seem to melt and merge and the flat lives where we can hardly distinguish the brutish from the sublime, are caught and set down with such faithfulness that once we have read about them we carry them in the mind's eye all our lives.

The style, too, has something of the same quality. There is an evenness, a fusing of the plain and the heroic, an apparent monotony that deceives us into thinking it is dull until we turn a corner and a flash of irony or a quietly perfect phrase reveals to us that we have climbed a hill, that, inconsiderable in itself, gives us a wide view

over a country that is certainly not romantic but nevertheless infinitely desirable.

Much of all this Rutherford owed to his father, who had a fine prose style and "used to say he owed it to Cobbett," and who was accustomed to tell his son, "My boy, when you write anything you consider particularly fine, strike it out." Like the country, the style becomes rich by refusing to spend itself upon extravagances, and in this both style and country are at the very heart of the English Puritan tradition.

The Revolution in Tanner's Lane goes for once beyond the world of *Cowfold* and proves that the limitations which Rutherford normally imposed upon himself were not the result of mental poverty and provincialism. The book falls into two parts. The first deals with London and Manchester in the years just before and just after Waterloo. It has as its subject the illegal Radical clubs and as its climax the march of the Blanketeers.

There are quite a number of books which deal sympathetically with the sufferings of the people in this period, but this book deals with their struggle and their hopes. More than that, some of its most eloquent passages defend the right to Revolution. Zachariah Coleman says :

"I believe in insurrection. Everlasting debate—and it is not genuine debate, for nobody really ranges alongside his enemy's strongest points—demoralises us all. . . . When a company of poor men meet together and declare that things have got to such a pass that they must either kill their enemies or die themselves, the world then thinks there must, after all, be *some* difference between right and wrong."

The second part of the book, connected with the first by the merest apology of a common plot, is about life in *Cowfold* twenty years later. At first sight there could hardly be a more complete contrast than that between the revolutionary turmoil of the first part and the rural calm of the second. And no doubt this contrast is part of the intention, but not the only or the main part. For, surprisingly enough, there is a common thread of the class struggle, even though Rutherford sees it rather as a struggle against stupidity and oppression, running through both. We are shown that the same forces which we have seen at work in Castlereagh's London and Nadin's Manchester are also at work in the "peaceful" countryside and in a different historical period. The fact that he makes this new struggle centre round the Corn Laws rather than round Chartism is probably not important, since the whole character of Chartism was so distorted and obscured by bourgeois historians that it is only now beginning to be properly understood.

What is important is that we are forced by implication to conclude that the struggle is a part of the very nature of our society, is permanent and necessary and will continue as long as society retains its present character.

What the end will be we are not told. Rutherford did not see the end and never pretended to. Characteristically, the final sentence of the book is "At present I do not know." Only, very deep down we can perceive a faith that an end there must be, a belief in the essential rightness and necessity of democracy that in the long run must make the stupidities and weaknesses of democrats unimportant.

We must always beware of asking any writer questions he does not pretend to answer, of expecting wisdom beyond the wisdom possible to his class and age, of

expecting him to look at his time with our eyes. Rutherford has and does none of these things, but no writer of his age and class saw further or more clearly. His advantage in being the *last* Puritan was that he stands nearest to us of all those who have seen by the light of that tradition : though he worked by a failing light, he was able to bring it closer to the object.

1941.

A Scale Model of the Future

IT happens sometimes that a man comes to be remembered not for the work which he believed to be solid and important, but for some apparent trifle, lightly conceived and rapidly executed. Often such judgments of posterity are unfair: but in the case of William Morris I think this is not so.

Morris was a great man by any standards—as a poet, as a craftsman, as one of the founders of Socialism in Britain. Yet, if he is widely known to-day, it is for none of these things, but on account of a little tale which he wrote as a serial in *The Commonweal*. That tale, *News From Nowhere* is an imaginative, sometimes perhaps fanciful, picture of Britain as he hoped it might become in the future. A Utopia in short. What of that? Have there not been scores of such books both before and since? There have, yet *News From Nowhere* remains unique in that it is a Utopia based on scientific Socialism solidified and given life by the imagination of a great poet.

To understand its peculiar quality we have to recall a few facts about Morris himself. It is commonly said that about 1880, at the age of 45 or so, he became a Socialist. It would be more true, I think, to say that at this time he *discovered* himself to be a Socialist, for everything that he did and said after this time is implicit in what he did and said and was all his life. From the start he was concerned above all else with one thing: what do men need to be happy? Rejecting all high-flown and idealistic theories he answered this question clearly and simply enough. Men need, he believed,

fellowship, abundance of the necessaries of life, air, sun and joy in their work. So he wrote of the people of Burgh Dale that they lived

"in much ease and plenty of life, though not delicately or desiring things out of measure. They toiled with their hands and wearied themselves ; and they rested from their toil and feasted and were merry ; to-morrow was not a burden to them, nor yesterday a thing they would fain forget ; life shamed them not, nor did death make them afraid."

One more thing was needed to complete the tale. As early as 1857, in one of his first romances, *Svend and his Brethren*, Morris wrote of a people who were rich and powerful and prosperous, but who were to be pitied and not envied because they were not free. For him, men could enjoy no happiness except in a free society. And presently he began to study the ancient cultures of the North, especially of Iceland, and he came to see that the freedom of the Icelanders arose from the relative absence of classes. Once he had understood this it was impossible, Morris being the man he was, not to draw the general conclusion that freedom means the abolition of classes and that therefore man could only be completely happy in a classless society.

It is with such a society and its consequences in terms of human life and happiness that *News From Nowhere* is principally concerned. Morris was not specially interested in the mechanics of such a society, though those who think of him primarily as a prophet of the return to handicrafts might do well to remember, for example, the passage in which he writes :

"Why should people collect together to use power, when they can have it at the places where they live,

or hard by, any two or three of them ; or any one, for the matter of that ? ”

Written in 1890 this is a curiously exciting anticipation of Lenin's insistence on the need for electrification.

Yet all such hints, and there are a number of them, about the detail of the future society are only incidental. What interested Morris was man himself, and, where most Utopias give us any amount of detail about things, but leave human nature pretty much as we know it, he preferred to sketch in the changes of things with the lightest of strokes and to concentrate our attention on the changes in human nature. The theme of *News From Nowhere* is the new human and social relations into which its people have entered, and the transformation of all relationships now existing. Morris was not so foolish as to believe that men would become perfect, that they would never be unhappy or angry or stupid. But he insisted that all the problems of social life would be encountered on a new and higher level and were capable of solution. Man in his Utopia has become the master of his environment and of himself.

It is possible to be critical of many of the details of this book—probably Morris himself hardly took them very seriously, regarding them as mere trimmings to give colour and relief to his central truth. But about this central theme there is an unmistakable air of authority. Morris seems to speak as an eye-witness concerning things he himself had seen, possibly because in his own life and work he had actually realised, so far as any individual could do under existing conditions, the kind of happiness which will one day be possible for all. It cannot be too strongly emphasised that Morris was not a Socialist because he was miserable and maladjusted to his world. On the contrary he was outstandingly happy

and successful and was a Socialist because he understood perfectly the limits which capitalism places upon all happiness and prosperity even under the most favourable conditions. It is this authority and assurance which have given *News From Nowhere* its special position in our literature.

Until 1917, and indeed later, since only gradually did the meaning of 1917 force itself on the outside world, we had to take our Socialism on trust. We believed it would work, and the Paris Commune had given us a faint idea of what the first steps might be like. But no one had seen it, no one knew. Yet here, in this Utopia of Morris, was, as it were, a scale model, an account, imaginative indeed, but so convincing that thousands of readers over a whole generation have been moulded and informed and moved to action by it, have felt themselves compelled to say, "Yes, that is what it will be like."

To-day we have become more conscious of its limitations, the result of the still imperfect understanding of Socialism in Britain in 1890, from which not even Morris could be exempt, of his pre-occupation with handicrafts, of his cult of the Middle Ages, and of other factors inevitable to his age and environment. Above all, perhaps, we now measure it against what has now actually been accomplished by almost a quarter of a century of Soviet Power. Seen thus it gains and loses. Loses because the imagined must always pale before the real, but gains because the real shows how true and strong and deep and even how unexpected was the imagined. Here and there we are disappointed because Morris has failed to anticipate what we have perhaps no right to expect him to have anticipated, but far more often we are astonished and delighted to find his faith justified and his vision and ours confirmed.

Lowes Dickinson: Philosopher and Scapegoat

LOWES DICKINSON was neither a great writer nor a profound and original thinker, nor yet a man who made much stir in the world, and yet it is just and right that he should be remembered and honoured, for he was a social portent of the most unmistakable kind, and his passing marked the end of an age.

Ever since the coming of industrial capitalism in Britain there have existed writers who have served as a kind of incarnate conscience for their class and generation. They have tormented themselves for the sins of their tribe, till the agony of it has driven them to madness, as it did Ruskin, or into the sort of limbo of partial forgetfulness which Dickinson appears to have inhabited in the last years when he had abandoned the struggle with the feeling that he had done all that one man could do and yet had succeeded in nothing. A feeling which was unjust to himself in a sense, for *The International Anarchy* at least is a book which has counted and is likely to remain the permanent and classic history of the diplomacy of the decade up to 1914, just as Lenin's Imperialism is likely to remain the classic exposition of the deeper truth underlying the diplomatic currents.

Dickinson's ruling passion was a desire for truth, coupled with a full understanding of the difficulty of attaining it. He sought truth for its humanistic value, not only because he wished to understand his world, but also because he thought that man needs truth above all other things, and, even if he cannot find it, is still immeas-

urably enriched by its pursuit. Sometimes he was a little naive in his search, as for example, in his study of Plotinus or in his very mild flirtation with occultism.

More serious was the great attack upon Hegel. In 1887 he writes to Roger Fry :

"I've really begun my tussel (sic) with Hegel, it's the hardest work I ever had, worse than Plotinus. You will wonder doubtless why I bother myself, but it's worth bothering about, for the thing that Hegel professes to do (I haven't the least notion whether he's done it) is the thing I've always wanted done as the preliminary to anything else in thought: i.e., to establish the relation of thought in general to the objective world and what it is thought everywhere is trying to do and what is its necessary movement."

This was, I think, the critical moment for Dickinson, but it was not his lucky day. It could, indeed, hardly have been expected that the philosophic backwoods of Cambridge, under the rule of the ingrained idealism of McTaggart, could have been penetrated at this date by the news of the inversion of the Hegelian dialectic which had been performed by Marx. Nor if the news of this, the most momentous event in the history of modern philosophy, had reached Cambridge, was Cambridge ready to understand its significance. So that from this point the quarry began to draw away, and later in life Dickinson was to write :

"Our reading seems to me in retrospect to have been very unprofitable. We never really discussed the difficulties: and the whole notion (so preposterous it now seems to me) that the world can be deduced from absolute logic, and that, being so deduced, it somehow changes its whole character merely by

becoming what is called "rational" we merely accepted as a kind of article of faith."

Henceforth Dickinson's attempt to change the world, always one of his main preoccupations, took on a more empirical tinge: he turned to a direct study of social and international relations and largely abandoned any attempt to fit them within a formal philosophic framework. This was not altogether a loss, since, while (lacking the master-clue) he never fully understood the social mechanism of the world in which he lived, his studies in detail are often of the utmost value.

Yet the main task he set himself, that of comprehending and changing his world, *was* impossible. No man living in a society as unjust and as violent as our own, and believing passionately in justice and mercy, and remaining so much a part of society as to be unable to see that beyond abstract justice lies a greater and more positive revolutionary justice, can do anything but suffer in it. And the more perfect his integrity the more utter and limitless will be his suffering and the more complete his sense of frustration. Dickinson was such a man, and the record of his dealing with his generation is now before us.

Up to 1914 it was possible for him in certain moods to hope and imagine that the world was going his way, was quietly transforming itself into what he would have had it, a democracy of aristocrats. So he concludes *A Modern Symposium*:

"I thought of Cantilupe and Harington, of Allison and Wilson, and beyond them of the vision of the dawn and the daybreak, of Woodman, the soul, and Vivian, the spirit. I paused for a last look down the line of bright statues that bordered the long walk below me. I fancied them stretching away to the foot of Olympus:

and without elation or excitement, but with the calm of assured hope, I prepared to begin the new day."

And on the sacred mountain of T'ai Shan "where for four thousand years God has been worshipped according to Chinese legend, where certainly Confucius came, and Emperor after Emperor, and streams of pilgrims year after year," he experienced the same mood.

These moods were occasional, and because of their rarity, precious. When he remembered the foot of Imperialism upon the throat of his beloved China, or contemplated the rotting away of capitalist civilisation even before its climax was attained, he could only hope that the appearance was deceptive and that a further reality lay behind. The outbreak of war in 1914 proved the vanity of these hopes, founded only upon desire.

Even so, he never fully realised what was amiss. The very title of his greatest work, *The International Anarchy*, shows how far he was from appreciating the real causes of war, and his work for the establishment of a League of Nations was the result of an innocent belief that war could be prevented by purifying diplomacy and informing the mass of decent people of the things that were being done in their name. He certainly never foresaw for a moment the uses to which the League, in whose inception he had probably a greater share than any other single man, was to be put by the politicians.

So that in the end he failed, and his failure can hardly have been any the less bitter because he came to see that it had been foreordained by the nature of the society he was attacking. He died and has left no Elisha to inherit even a half-portion. There will be no more Dickinsons and the conscience of the bourgeoisie will be kept no longer. No longer is it possible for a man of Dickinson's

intellect and integrity to associate himself, however critically, with a dying system and a dead class. He is the last intellectual hero that the bourgeoisie has produced and it can produce no more; men of his stamp to-day must come, and are coming, into the camp of the revolution.

1934.

The Land of Lost Content

TWO problems were presented to us by A. E. Housman. The first was that of the nature of the impulse which made a poet, at least once or twice in his life, of the stiff, rather crotchety classical scholar. The second was why *A Shropshire Lad*, for twenty-five years his only book of verse, became a best seller, running through edition after edition and winning a curiously personal kind of affection from thousands of people who ordinarily don't care much about poetry at all.

The first problem must remain unsolved, at least for some time to come. The second is worth attention because it raises indirectly the more general problem of what are the qualities which make a poetry popular. *A Shropshire Lad* slipped quietly into the world in 1896, when the inflated tradition of the followers of Swinburne and the involved tradition of the followers of Browning had just about sickened the ordinary person of the name of poetry. It was, too, in spite of the popularity of Kipling, a time when a more profound scepticism than had existed before was being shown towards the value and values of capitalist culture.

So these poems, with their cool, simple style, their directness, their irony and their occasional outburst of despair gave the plain reader something that he had been missing. Here were ordinary people doing quite ordinary things: playing football, drinking in pubs, ploughing and following the changing colours of "the beautiful and death-struck year."

But there was much that was not ordinary, a graveyard eye that saw death behind every manifestation of life,

and a disdainful sorrow that rises to its height in the poem that ends :

Ay look ; high heaven and earth ail from the prime foundation :

All thoughts to rive the heart are here, and all are vain :

Horror and scorn and hate and fear and indignation
Oh why did I awake ? when shall I sleep again ?

About the personal springs of this opposition we cannot even speculate, but two points are important. First, that the despair in Housman's poetry reflected, without his knowing it I think, the decay and destruction of English rural life under capitalism. It is neither necessary nor possible here to discuss the reasons for this decay, but throughout the nineteenth century a double process had been going on which was changing the countryside from a place where men normally lived and worked into a combination of slum and playground. The country was becoming a place from which one *went away*. Any young worker with brains and ambition tended to gravitate towards the town with its cultural possibilities and the prospect at least of a decently paid job.

Yet these hopes, too, were often illusory, and Housman often writes as the transplanted countryman regretting what he has left behind :

We still had sorrows to lighten,
One could not always be glad,
And lads knew trouble at Knighton
When I was a Knighton lad.

By bridges the Thames runs under,
In London, the town built ill,
'Tis sure small matter for wonder
If sorrow is with one still.

The country is seen as a past, beautiful and death-struck like the year, and in this Housman not only looks back as an individual to the villages he has left, but also historically to the period before capitalism had cut away their roots :

That is the land of lost content,
I see it shining plain,
The happy highways where I went
And cannot come again.

Of course the past was never really so Arcadian, either historically or for the individual, but what is being voiced is the tendency of the dispossessed peasant to look back to the security he has lost with his land.

In the second place we have to note that the poetry of *A Shropshire Lad* is a dramatic poetry. Housman was not a peasant, writing directly and unselfconsciously, like Burns or Clare, from his own experience, yet it is not the Professor of Latin who speaks in his own person. It is a young countryman, with the background and the interests of a countryman, but with the feeling and sensibilities of a fine lyric poet. To create this character Housman makes use of two devices that are possibly unique in our poetry, certainly unique in combination.

The first is the power to make poetry directly out of country thought and proverbial philosophy. So when he thinks of winter he feels about it as a ploughman who has too few blankets and who rises before the sun :

Now dreary dawns the eastern light,
And fall of eve is drear,
And cold the poor man lies at night,
And so goes out the year.

Secondly, he has Englished his classicism, which is more than that of the Irish hedge-scholar than that of the lecture room. He thinks of the wind blowing

through holt and hanger
When Uricon the city stood

and adds immediately

Then, 'twas before my time, the Roman
At yonder heaving hill would stare.

Whatever he writes about, Housman brings very near to us, always remembering that he writes as a countryman who neither knows nor cares to know anything about our industrial city life.

It is above all in his style that he is classical, in the precision of his images and in the deliberate quietness that sometimes borders upon understatement. It is this quietness that will preserve his poetry long after the pessimism and despair that first made it fashionable has been outmoded. For the truth is that this despair often rings a little false, is the one element in his poetry which is not quite under control. It is also an aristocratic pessimism, the most specifically reactionary element in his poetry. But it is commonly coupled with a stoic resolution that is not necessarily reactionary.

The troubles of our proud and angry dust
Are from eternity and shall not fail,

he writes. But he continues, even more characteristically,

Bear them we can, and if we can we must,
Shoulder the sky, my lad, and drink your ale.

Housman believes the world to be bad in the main and in the main incurably so. But higher than the malignancy of things he sets the courage and dignity of man. This courage, he believes, draws strength from a man's

comradeship with his fellows, even though this may not save him, and from his feeling for natural beauty, even though

Nature, heartless, witless nature
Will neither care nor know
What stranger's foot may find the meadow.

And though this courage and dignity cannot save men from disaster, yet it can prevent them from being overwhelmed by disaster.

All Housman's poetry is full of the sense of struggle, though it is not the struggle of classes but the undifferentiated struggle between man and the nature of things. The stoicism which is man's armour for this struggle is often explicitly stated in the course of the poems. It is always implicit in the bare nobility of his style and in his unfailing lyricism. Potentially it is a revolutionary weapon. The same courage which Housman values negatively as a capacity for endurance, becomes, in the hands of the revolutionary, a positive and powerful weapon for the transformation of the world.

1936.

Chesterton: Man of Thermidor

Of all Chesterton's people the one who most clearly reveals the mind of his maker is Mr. Turnbull, the petty-bourgeois enragé. Day after day he sits in his toyshop upon the magic mountain of Notting Hill, setting up against present boredom memories of past battles and dreams of future barricades. He is a "patriot of '89" who has never ceased to grieve for Thermidor. In the miracle of the war for the independence of Notting Hill came Mr. Turnbull's opportunity : Chesterton is a picturesque survival for whom no such miracle can happen. Thermidor is a fact, industrial capitalism is a fact, and against one fact must be opposed not day dreams about Valmy and Cobbett, but other facts on the same plane of reality. Nevertheless, survivals do have a certain interest and the day dreams of a poet may even be of importance since he is able to give them the semblance of an objective, independent existence, so that it will perhaps be as well to begin our dissection of Chesterton's bourgeois-revolutionary attitude by isolating those parts of it which seem to be wholly or partly worthy of praise.

He has, first of all, a fine contempt for Law and for Parliamentary reformism, based on his knowledge that under capitalism the State will always be the instrument of money-power. He is too sincere a democrat to be deceived by our facade of democracy. From politicians and from the methods of politicians no good thing can come :

"Men of tact that arbitrate, slow reform that heals
Save the stinking grease, master, save it for the
wheels."

Against the politicians he raises his barricades, as in the poem addressed to Walter Long, a now forgotten Tory hack, a poem that is certainly one of the finest of modern satires :

. . . . see that you do not wake
 Death and the splendour of the scarlet cap,
 Boston and Valmy, Yorktown and Jemappes,
 Freedom in arms, the riding and the routing,
 The thunder of the captains and the shouting,
 All that lost riot that you did not share—
 And when that riot comes—you will be there.

His misfortune is that he is too apt to raise his barricades in places where no one is ever likely to attack them : Boston and Valmy are fought and done with, but there are more recent and significant barricades in Dublin, Petrograd, Hamburg and elsewhere that seem somehow to have escaped his notice. At all events he has never expressed any very urgent desire to die on these, though that may perhaps be due to a realisation that his barricading days are over.

Barricades are, in any case, neither the beginning nor the end of revolution. Chesterton, who has always been particularly open to French influences, possibly because the bourgeois-revolutionary tradition in France has trailed the most glory, shows strong traces of the doctrines of Blanqui and Sorel, and carries his romantic belief in the value of a sudden armed rising to the extent of regarding violence as admirable for its own sake. Thus in the poem dedicated to the comic-opera Royalist insurrectionary Déroulède, he makes no distinction between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary action :

Lay down your sword. And let the White Flag fade
 To grey ; and let the Red Flag fade to pink,

For those that climb and climb ; and cannot sink
So deep as death and honour, Déroulède.

It is therefore not surprising to find Chesterton later the apologist for Imperialist war, nor would it be quite surprising to find him becoming the champion of Fascism.

Again, Chesterton hates many things that are vile and contemptible. All our disagreement cannot prevent us from being grateful for such things as *Antichrist, or the Reunion of Christendom* and *Geography*. He hates exploitation and might hate poverty as well if he had not acquired, perhaps from too hasty a reading of the New Testament and Paul Sabatier's *Life of St. Francis*, some misty idea of its holiness. He attacks Empire and exploitation, but in the name of the mythical past, and sets up against the Union Jack not the Red Flag but the Cross of St. George. The result of this mistake is clearly visible in time of war. During the Boer War, which was an attack by a great Empire on a small and backward community, his attitude was clear and uncompromising :

For so that conquered and so we scattered,
When the Devil rode and his dogs smelt gold,
And the peace of a harmless folk was shattered. . . .

When the Great War came in 1914 the essential weakness of his position was revealed. In the struggle between two rival Imperialist groups the fact that he believed in the curious fetish he called "England," a much sinning, often misled but fundamentally sacred abstraction, turned the revolutionary into the author of that ultra-jingoist pamphlet *The Crimes of England*.

The England of St. George is one of Chesterton's blind spots. He must be aware, superficial historian though he is, that exploitation and misery have been constant fea-

tures of all historic forms of social organisation, though in controversy he may sometimes be lured into an implicit denial of this, but he is not prevented thereby from basing his politic upon an emotional reaction to the past. Of the two main sources of Chesterton's weakness, one is this tendency to be betrayed by his emotions into attitudes that are dishonest because they are unreal. An interesting example is his anti-semitic bias. An intellectual dislike of capitalists and an emotional distaste for Jews is simplified and satisfied by a whole-hearted hatred for Jewish financiers. In this way an entirely false antithesis is created, which, by ignoring both the Gentile capitalist and the Jewish worker, ignores also the struggle of classes which is the only possible foundation for any modern revolutionary movement. Here, again, we are reminded of the fact that it is the petty-bourgeois enragé who is the recruit most easily won for Fascism.

The truth is, and this brings us to Chesterton's second weakness, that he has no clear conception of the class struggle. As I have pointed out, he is a "patriot of '89," and his political ideas are those of a century ago. Belfort Bax has shown in his book on Babeuf that the essential difference between the mode of thought of the Jacobin and of the modern Marxist revolutionary is due to the fact that in the eighteenth century the division of society into capitalists and proletarians was only beginning. In 1798 it was quite natural to think in terms of king and people, rich and poor, nobleman and commoner, and "Citizen" was an honourable appellation when the bourgeoisie was just beginning to reach out for power. Under these conditions political inequality was more apparent than economic exploitation, because the bourgeoisie only desired free air to increase its already considerable riches. Consequently the rallying cry of "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" was almost entirely

political in its application. The poor believed that a change of masters would improve their position and this belief seems also to have been held sincerely enough by large numbers of middle-class revolutionaries. It needed the experience of the contractor's paradise of the Directory and the bitter poverty of the succeeding half-century to make it clear to everyone that the bourgeois Revolution had only prepared the ground for a new industrial servitude.

Clear, that is, to everyone except Chesterton. He is perfectly aware of the fact of industrial servitude, but he cannot see that it is the logical result of the rise of the bourgeoisie, in which the French Revolution was a decisive event. He alone of all men who have preserved a revolutionary outlook has kept his faith in the old ritual incantation "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity." The element of ritual in his makeup is reinforced by his Catholicism. Religion adds yet another skein to the hopeless tangle of his political thinking. It is, further, the most reactionary kind of religion existing in the world to-day, a religion that however it is romanticised can only lead in logic to the most rigidly authoritarian conception of society. Chesterton is only saved, in so far as he is saved, because he has never properly assimilated the faith which he professes.

It is almost inevitable that a pious Catholic will idealise the Middle Ages, since it was then that Catholicism was most flourishing. Indeed, if Catholicism is what it is claimed to be, it is only logical to suppose that an age when all men were Catholic would surpass all others in holiness, and consequently, one would expect, in prosperity. Chesterton's illusion about the Middle Ages takes the form of a supposition that the medieval man, whether he was a guildsman working in a town or a peasant cultivating the common fields, was master of his life and destiny

in a way that men are not at the present day. In several places he speaks of Magna Carta in terms that might easily have been used by Cobbett or any of the early Radicals.

The result of all this is that he hopes to lead us back to the Medieval Paradise by way of the eighteenth century Revolution. We are to march home to Zion chanting "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" to the *Tonus Peregrinus*. . . . Meanwhile let us develop cottage industries. . . . Sitting by the waters of the river of a strange land, weeping over Thermidor.

1934.

E. M. Forster and the Classless Society

"The first act of the State, in which it really acts as the representative of the whole of Society, namely the assumption of control over the means of production on behalf of society, is also its last independent act as a State. The interference of the authority of the State with social relations will then become superfluous in one field after another, and finally will cease of itself. The authority of the Government over persons will be replaced by the administration of things and the direction of the processes of production. The State will not be 'abolished'; it will wither away."—*Engels*.

"This new culture of a humanity that is united for the first time in history, and has abolished all State boundaries, will, unlike capitalist culture, be based upon clear and transparent human relationships."—*Programme of the Communist International*.

PERHAPS the most striking feature of contemporary literature is its abundance of talented writers and its remarkable absence of great books. It would be easy to name twenty writers who have seemed at one point or another to be on the point of producing a masterpiece. After writing two or three good books they almost invariably begin to slip back just at the point where their work approaches the boundary between the good and the great.

The reason is, I believe, that there is to-day no mass audience to which these writers can appeal. There is a small audience, highly cultured and interested in technique, but too introverted and too conscious of its impending destruction to allow of either joyful writing or serene reading. It is for this audience, however, that literature is being created, and from it come the vast majority of serious writers. Outside this there are all the strata for whom reading matter is provided. This

reading matter varies enormously in sophistication from the Savile Row of Aldous Huxley, through the suburban chic of Ethel Mannin to the slop-shop of *Peg's Paper* and Sexton Blake. In each case, however, it is purely commodity production and is governed by the same laws as control the production of other types of manufactured articles.*

It is no doubt true that this gap has always existed, but it has certainly never been so wide. In the first place, the present abundance of cheap reading matter has only existed during the last few generations. More important than this is the general decline of bourgeois culture, which, following upon a period of unparalleled industrial expansion, has underlined the class nature of society and has also resulted in the great mass of the upper and middle classes drifting into the ranks of the consumers of manufactured reading matter.

Under these conditions few writers are likely to realise their potentialities. In any other age James Joyce and T. S. Eliot, to name two only of the most significant contemporary figures, would have been writers of the first rank. Born in the sixteenth century Eliot might well have been a finer poet than Donne: born in the seventeenth, Joyce might have been greater than Swift. Even to-day they are of tremendous importance, but their importance is as much sociological as literary.

Eliot writes for an audience which actually exists: an audience of people who are approximately at his level of sensibility but who are for the most part intel-

* This was written nearly twelve years ago. Since then it is, I think, possible to see the emergence of a new kind of audience and of a new kind of writing. The reader should also be reminded that this essay was written before Aldous Huxley had taken himself to Pacifism and the Higher Seriousness.

lectually his inferiors. It is an audience that has failed to find a solution to its problems but which refuses to believe that no solution exists. Joyce, on the other hand, writes for an audience of super-intellectuals that does not exist and is never likely to exist. *Work in Progress* is the groping and muttering of a Samson in the prison-house at Gaza : no good can come to him even from the rout and slaughter of the Philistines.

Like Joyce, Forster writes for an audience that does not now exist, but, unlike him, for one that will come into being even though it may have to wait for a hundred years. Whether this appropriate audience will actually read Forster is another matter, and one with which we cannot be concerned. All this is equivalent to saying that Forster writes for the classless society that will grow up on the far side of the Revolution, and it is therefore necessary to consider what are likely to be the characteristics of that society.

At the moment when Helen Schlegel in *Howards End* learns of her sister's engagement to Mr. Wilcox, an event which was to be of decisive importance to them both, she makes her confession of a faith which seems also to be Forster's :

" . . . personal relations are the important thing for ever and ever, and not this outer world of telegrams and anger."

I believe that a realisation of the importance and possibility of personal relations will be the distinguishing mark of the classless society. After the Revolution will come the age of Iron, when the consciousness of society will be directed towards solving the problem of poverty by the intelligent use of machines. But inevitably we shall reach a point where the improvement of industrial technique has little to offer a world that has a plentiful

supply of necessities and has ceased to desire wealth for personal ostentation. At the same time we shall be moving towards the point where a reconstruction of human values is possible.

Savages have little need for personal relationships because every action is closely conditioned by the custom of the tribe or group. They marry, make war, win food and amuse themselves along lines so rigidly laid down as to make the idea of such relationships almost incomprehensible. With the growth of civilisation such sanctions tend to disappear or to be modified into a moral code. In time this also comes to be questioned, and to-day we are discovering that the bases of many of our moral and religious beliefs are to be found in the tribal customs of savages. These beliefs are maintained largely by and for the economic structure of society but are gradually becoming weaker.

After the Revolution they will disappear rapidly, and will be replaced by a new, temporary, "war-time" morality, but largely by genuine personal relationships. As the Iron Age comes to an end with the "withering away of the State" the war morality will be replaced entirely by these latter. The conquest of poverty will enable men for the first time seriously to tackle the more subtle and fundamental problems of gregariousness.

The statement that Forster is the novelist of this classless society is one whose importance and meaning may be easily misunderstood. Many writers have been able to shut their eyes on existing society and conjure up visions of a new and quite different order. Forster is not one of these. His importance lies in the fact that he is able to see the existing society as it is and to discover in it the seeds of the new society. In his novels

he exhibits the essence of the new at work within the substance of the old.

There is a passage in *A Room with a View* which describes Lucy playing Beethoven in the Pension Bertolini :

"Passion was there, but it could not be easily labelled ; it slipped between love and hatred and jealousy, and all the furniture of the pictorial style. And she was tragical only in the sense that she was great, for she loved to play on the side of Victory. Victory of what and over what—that is more than the words of daily life can tell us. But that some Sonatas of Beethoven are written tragic no one can gainsay ; yet they can triumph or despair as the player decides, and Lucy had decided that they should triumph."

And in *Howard's End*, his most completely conscious novel, Forster does define Victory, again with reference to Beethoven :

"And the goblins—had they not really been there at all ? They were only the phantoms of cowardice and unbelief ? One healthy human impulse could dispel them ? Men like the Wilcoxes or President Roosevelt would say yes. Beethoven knew better. They might return—and they did. . . . Beethoven chose to make all right in the end. He built the ramparts up. He blew with his mouth for the second time and the goblins were scattered. He brought back the gusts of splendour, the heroism, the youth, the magnificence of life and death, and, amid vast roarings of super-human joy, he led his fifth symphony to its conclusion. But the goblins were there. They could return. He had said so bravely and that is why one can trust Beethoven when he says other things."

Like Beethoven, Forster is "on the side of Victory." He believes that we can and must achieve valid human relationships. This is something quite different from the optimism of the happy ending. Leonard Bast, the hero (if there is a hero) of *Howard's End*, passes through a life of sordid misery to an ambiguous death. He never achieves more than a glimpse of the kind of life of which he is capable. Helen and Margaret Schlegel, who are sensitive and honest and generous, injure him terribly by reason of these very qualities, and can do nothing to repair the damage they have done. In *The Longest Journey* Rickie dies having failed in everything he undertook, and having betrayed his deepest instincts for the sake of approximations. Death and failure and suffering are everywhere as common and as pitiful in his books as they are in the world around us—and yet, quite unmistakably, quite decisively, Forster is always on the side of victory.

He knows that, with the world as it is, to attempt to ignore telegrams and anger and to establish human relationships must inevitably lead to suffering and disaster, but he knows also that we must attempt this, that this way lies the future of man, and that in the very attempt is to be found the highest kind of satisfaction of which we are capable. The side of victory is the side of the classless society, and incidentally, here and now the side of the Revolution. This is the reason for the serenity of Forster's writing. Because he has made the leap into the future he is able to contemplate the present without shrinking. He alone of contemporary writers seems to be master rather than the plaything of our age of transition.

Inevitably, Forster, writing for an audience that does not yet exist, receives little understanding from the audience dominant to-day. A reviewer, who very

wisely prefers to remain anonymous, produced in *Life and Letters* a reaction that is typical and therefore worth examining :

" The general tone of these stories is that of one of his own refined spinsters ; weary, distinguished, witty and irritable with the irritability of the extremely sensitive. He can convey, with the precision of hatred, the very tone in which a stupid remark is spoken. But a story like *The Machine Breaks Down* (sic) needs to be written with more conviction and gusto. Gusto is not one of Forster's qualities ; and one does not want it to be ; but he should not choose themes that require it. " Do you see the mountain just behind Elizabeth's toque ? " inquires the heroine of *The Eternal Moment*. Forster's mountains do not thrill, but when he concentrates upon Elizabeth's toque in the foreground, no one can beat him."

If I am in any way correct in my judgment of Forster, the writer of this review is not merely wrong, but has stated the exact opposite of what is really the case, and, as this is a typical review it is worth while to account for his curious misconceptions.

In a general sense, of course, Forster's work must seem unfamiliar to anyone who does not believe passionately in the classless society or has failed to consider its nature and implications, but this is no excuse for regarding him as a writer of refined trivialities. Actually, he alone to-day possesses the capacity to deal with important themes and the courage to undertake them. His novels deal openly and triumphantly with such matters as Truth and Death and Victory in a way that must seem positively indecent to Mr. Huxley and all the little Huxleys who dominate the literary market. Perhaps they find the content of Forster's novels so disconcerting that they are

forced to shut their eyes to it and are thrown back upon his more superficial qualities.

Those who have never penetrated the shell of Forster's Cambridge Manner will almost inevitably make some such criticism as the one I have just quoted. The essence of the Cambridge Manner, a thing far less susceptible of analysis than its Oxford counterpart, seems to be a gentleness and hesitance of style that may conceal, and is often deliberately used to conceal, a passionate conviction whose holder is not sure that it will be reciprocated. In Forster this manner is present in an acute form, and leads him to understate, and to understate most where he is most in earnest. It leads him also to write often about people who seem inconclusive, and when he writes about decisive, elemental people like Stephen Wonham in *The Longest Journey*, or old Mr. Emerson in *A Room with a View*, he betrays a certain wistfulness, and they tend to become rather the vehicle of a splendid poetry than living souls. They are more prophecies than people. The weaknesses in their construction are all the more obvious to these critics because the counterparts of Stephen and Mr. Emerson who do exist are outside their experience, and so they are left with an overwhelming impression of a world inhabited by the Philip Vyses, the Mr. Pembrokes and the Mrs. Munts. To them a Forster character is usually Tibby Schlegel, rarely Margaret and never Helen.

They miss entirely, moreover, the undercurrent or theme that is important in all living novels but peculiarly so in the case of Forster's. Of all considerable novelists his plots are probably the most preposterous. People die and disappear in a quite irresponsible manner, and very rarely is any thread of narrative pursued uninterruptedly to its appropriate conclusion. This does not matter, because Forster is very little concerned with his plots :

" And a third man he says in a sort of drooping regretful voice, ' Yes—oh dear, yes—the novel tells a story.' I admire and respect the first speaker, I fear and detest the second. And the third is me. Yes—oh dear, yes—the novel tells a story. That is the fundamental aspect without which it could not exist. That is the highest common factor to all novels, and I wish that it was not so, that it could be something different—melody, or perception of the truth, not this low atavistic form."

The plot, then, is to Forster a necessary evil whose demands are to be evaded whenever possible, and we have to look elsewhere for the core of significance in his novels. On this point there is another important passage in *Aspects of the Novel*:

" Is there any effect in novels comparable to the effect of the Fifth Symphony as a whole, where, when the orchestra stops, we hear something that has never actually been played? . . . I cannot find an analogy. Yet there must be one: in music, fiction is likely to find its nearest parallel."

This may or may not be true in general: it is certainly true in its application to Forster's own novels, which seem not to be based on a plot but to be written around a theme, as is a piece of music. This is most easily seen in the short stories, which propose the basic ideas and symbols that are expressed in the novels by "round" characters in action. Thus, the "theme" of *The Machine Stops* is "Man is the measure"; of *The Point of It*, "I am I, and he who desires me is I"; of *Other Kingdom*, "Everything itself and not practically something different." For each story it is possible to find a theme: no doubt it is also possible to be mistaken in any given

case, but that the theme is there and is fundamental there is no room to doubt at all.

This theme is something entirely different from a "moral," and Forster's stories are not allegories except in the most elementary sense. The difference is easy to see if hard to explain, but seems to lie in the relation of theme to fable. The story in each case is a living growth which springs up around the theme, and not something written to illustrate it, while the theme is an integral part of the story and not an afterthought of elucidation.

The novels seem to be written in the same way, but naturally the possibility of error in detecting the theme is much greater and grows progressively so as the novels themselves become more complex. This growing complexity leads to arrangements that can only be described as contrapuntal: often one suspects the existence of two or more themes, related but distinct. Thus, the theme of *A Room with a View* is clearly "Victory" and the counter-theme may well be "Love is eternal." The theme of *The Longest Journey* may be "Sincerity and truth" and the counter-theme "There is another coinage"; and the themes of *Howard's End*, "Only connect" and "Death destroys a man, the idea of Death saves him."

All this is speculation. What is certain is that Forster has constructed his novels after the manner of a composer, and that those who will not listen for the undertones, and cannot catch the harmony of the completed work will be left with the impression of a tired, refined and talented writer neatly anatomising the shortcomings of trivial people.

It is no accident that when Forster, as in the passages I have quoted from *A Room with a View* and *Howard's*

End, wishes to express his deepest convictions he should use musical symbols and analogies. In Beethoven above all he finds his closest affinity, and to him he refers again and again. It is to Beethoven rather than to any of his fellow writers that one must look for his literary ancestry, and this is only another way of saying that Forster is a great poet. He has chosen to use the novel, the most characteristic contemporary medium, as Shakespeare chose to use the drama for similar reasons. And just as Shakespeare escaped from the claims of his characters from time to time to indulge in outbursts of quite undramatic poetry, so Forster perpetually transcends the bounds of narrative in lyrical or rhapsodic passages that are no more out of keeping with their surroundings than are "Timon hath made his everlasting mansions" or "Of many thousand kisses the poor last." It is as poet that Forster is most surely on the side of victory. It is as poet that he recognises most clearly the lineaments of the classless society.

1932.

Promise of Victory: a Note on the Negro Spiritual

WHAT is the secret of the appeal which the Negro religious songs have had for millions of people who cannot share the religious emotions they express, and have, perhaps, only the vaguest knowledge of the conditions under which they were created? It can only be, I think, that these songs say more than they appear to say, because they express some profound and fundamental human emotion common to a large part of the human race, and especially to that great majority which knows or feels itself to be exploited and oppressed.

Some of these songs have an obvious social or political meaning: *Go Down Moses* and *Joshua Fit de Battle of Jericho* need little interpretation, though it is interesting to note that according to William Patterson, a Negro scholar and revolutionary, Moses was the code name of Harriet Tubman who first organised the "underground railway" by which hundreds of slaves escaped into the free states of the North, and the singing of *Go Down Moses* was a recognised signal that all preparations were completed for an escape. It is easy to see, too, how the history of the Jews, another enslaved and tormented people, afforded countless parallels for the Negro slave. Not only Moses and Joshua, leaders of revolt, but the Messianic promises of Isaiah and the lamentations of the Babylonian captivity, David's triumph over Goliath and the restoration of Judah under Ezra spoke directly of their own lot or held promises for the future. And, as we shall see, the passage over Jordan was not only the symbol of entry into a happier world after death. Jordan actually stood for the boundary line between the slave

and the free states, and, less directly, for the ending of slavery altogether.

There is, indeed, a duality in religion which makes it under certain conditions a ground for battle between the ideologies of contending classes. The slave owner was not opposed to religion for his slaves : the picture of a meek and suffering Jesus quietly enduring wrongs had an only too obvious value. So also had the injunctions of Paul, concerned to secure a foothold for his religion by reconciling the slaves of the Roman Empire to their condition, insisting that all that Christian brotherhood demanded was the mutual recognition of rights and duties by all classes within the existing framework of slave society. Yet in practice it was never possible to limit the religion of the slave to the passive acceptance of these convenient doctrines.

After all, the suffering Jesus was also the triumphant Jesus, the hero who even in the midst of His sufferings and humiliations was greater and stronger than His oppressors. And the slave, identifying himself with the Man of Sorrows, could not be prevented from interpreting his triumph in a more practical, a more earthly, sense than was conducive to his continued obedience. We are reminded of the slogan of the serfs, revolting in Medieval England : "We are men, formed in Christ's likeness, and we are kept like beasts."

Nor could his attention be fixed solely upon the New Testament, and we know, from the history of our country in the seventeenth century, what a veritable Revolutionists' Handbook the Old Testament can become. Therefore it happened that, whatever his appointed teachers might say, the slave voiced in his religion, and above all in the religious songs in which the genius of his race found

fullest expression, the whole character of his life and his unconquerable belief in his ultimate emancipation.

The people who sang :

Were you there, were you there,
When they crucified my Lord ?

were thinking less of an atrocity committed outside Jerusalem two thousand years ago than of the lynching horrors they all knew and the bloody suppression of half a hundred slave revolts.

When I get to Heaven, goin' to sing and shout,
There ain't nobody goin' to put me out,

is the cry of the people outside society, segregated and humiliated by the colour bar and the Jim Crow system. It is in the same song that the direct statement of triumph arising out of agony swells to the height of great poetry :

I know my robe will fit me well,
I tried it on at the Gates of Hell.

Here is the voice of a people which has suffered and endured to the utmost and which emerges with a sense that it has not been found wanting, which knows that it has come unbroken from the most terrible test that the malignity of man or devil could devise, and that therefore nothing it can ever be called upon to face need make it afraid. Here is the source of the dignity and assurance which we all feel to be the Negro's outstanding quality.

Sometimes the sense of agony is overwhelming : there is a work song addressed to the sun which begins :

Go down, Old Hannah, don't you rise no more,

which has always seemed to me to be one of the most terrible songs in the world. And in many songs the desire for peace and rest, even if it is the rest of death, is the dominant theme. This is natural enough for slaves driven to the limit under the plantation system, or for share-croppers equally trapped in the mechanism of capitalism. Yet it is just at this point that the strangest transformation takes place, and one which gives these songs their unique and final value.

For, in case after case, what is insisted upon is not the peace but the triumph of death. Death is not only the release of the victim but the defeat of the oppressor. So that in *I stood by de Ribber of Jordan* :

Now sister you'd better be ready
 To see that ship come sailing over,
 Now sister you'd better be ready
 To see that ship come sailing by.
 O sister, don't you mourn
 To see that ship sail by.

Or in a typical emancipation song :

Oh, Oh, Freedom, Oh, Oh, Freedom,
 Freedom, Lord for me.
 An' before I be a slave
 I'll be buried in my grave,
 An' go home to my Lord an' be free,

it is hardly possible to say whether it is death or freedom or freedom in death which is the subject.

In a very real sense it is all three, and this is what gives these songs their extraordinary richness and depth. We feel that they exist on several planes at the same time, that the singer is aware of an opposition, which cannot

perhaps be logically resolved but which is resolved emotionally. Death is a friend, death is welcome, death is freedom, death is triumph over the oppressor. And it is perhaps just when the exploited has reached this point, the point at which even life no longer matters very much, at which he will no longer fear what man can do unto him, that nothing remains to hold him back from the struggle for life. And so, by a final resolution, death *is* life. Certainly it is true that the tunes of these particular songs are quite exceptionally alive, and that in them words and tune are inseparable: without the tune the words are often poor and misleading. The tune always gives the words a more positive stamp than they would bear alone. The tune is always a part of the resolution.

It is, then, the *absolute* quality of these songs that gives them their mastery over the imagination. Verbal and rhythmic merits, though they are often considerable, are always subordinated and subsidiary to an intensity of feeling and purpose. They are the work of a people who have lived in the depths and emerged, the Songs of the Three Holy Children coming alive out of the furnace. In them misery and defeat and weariness and cruelty, and man's last and greatest enemy, the fear of death, have been fairly encountered and overthrown. They are a new *Pilgrim's Progress* composed in the more universal language of song. They are a proof of the indestructible goodness and power to survive and conquer which exists not only in the Negro people but in all people everywhere. They give us a promise of victory in which we know we can have absolute trust.

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